The Nation.

November 21, 19

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EDITORIAL

IN PRAISE OF DISARRAY

"We are not in disarray," declared the Great Communicator last week at his fifth press conference in ten months. But, praise be, the Reagan foreign policy universe is not only in disarray but in shambles. There is not a single white knight in all the "very happy group" of jousting contestants. Caspar Weinberger, Alexander Haig and Richard Allen are equally wrong in their views, but they are wrong in such divergent ways that nothing bad can be accomplished. Fortunately, their boss is content; the "accomplishments" of our foreign policy, he said, were "astounding."

What is really astounding is how quickly and casually Reagan & Co. have managed to frighten the wits out of a lot of Europeans and unite them against us. And what is truly astonishing is that the President shows no sign of understanding why huge protest marches take place across the Continent after he and his aides propound a military policy that would encourage a nuclear war confined to Europe. Perhaps he blames all the ruckus over there on irresponsible reporters in the "big ear," who are unmindful that "every word that is uttered here in Washington winds up . . . in all the other countries of the world." Presumably the next time the Secretary of State complains about a "guerrilla campaign" in the White House, the reporter on the other end of the line should give the information the same weight as Haig's reports of guerrilla activities in El Salvador.

Speaking of which, we must also note that the bickering between Haig's State Department and Weinberger's soldiers has possibly prevented direct intervention in El Salvador. Given the poisonous ingredients of Reagan's policies, a continuing stalemate in Washington is the best we can hope for. So onward and upward with internecine conflict in the White House. It's the best way to avoid a real one abroad.

FALL BOOKS ISSUE

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THE MISSING SYNTHESIS

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO HISTORY?

HERBERT G. GUTMAN

American politics and American society, to say nothing of the American economy, are in a bad way. So, too, is American history. Clio's misfortunes have existed for some time. For about thirty years, American history has been without coherent focus and has lacked compelling central themes. But it took an early Sunday morning session at the American Writers Congress last month to reveal, once again, that our history is suffering from this seemingly endless affliction.

Perhaps as many as 125 people (few of them historians) heard a discussion of the question "Have Writers Discarded History?" The literary historian Alan Trachtenberg served as moderator, and I made brief comments along with fellow historians Nell Irvin Painter and Kathryn Kish Sklar and novelist E. L. Doctorow.

The question was intriguing. If answered affirmatively, it would mean that historians—not just writers—have discarded history. Historians, after all, are writers. Rather than censure other writers for not reading the unreadable in so many specialized historical journals, I asked whether or not historians themselves have abandoned history. A generation ago, historians cut their eye teeth on splendid synthetic works such as V. Gordon Childe's *What Happened in History*. Now there is worry about what has happened *to* history. And for good reason.

We know much more about the American past as we enter the 1980s than we did when we entered the 1960s. And yet the past is more inaccessible to nonhistorians than it was thirty or fifty years ago. Why that is so cannot be under-

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LETTERS.

IN DEFENSE OF THE A.C.L.U.

New York City

A slur against the American Civil Liberties Union in a recent editorial ["Hanging Together," *The Nation*, Nov. 7] requires a response. The editorial refers to "a controversial secret meeting" between lobbyists for the A.C.L.U. dealing with the names-of-agents legislation and representatives of the Central Intelligence Agency. This characterization of the meeting is warranted only in the sense that the A.C.L.U. does not publish a calendar of its meetings with public officials or private individuals, any more than *The Nation* publishes a calendar of the meetings held by its editors.

As the editorial indicates, the A.C.L.U. opposes any legislation against the naming of agents. When it became virtually certain (*The Nation* uses the word "probable," though this is too weak) that such legislation would be adopted, the A.C.L.U. worked to narrow its reach. That involved a meeting with representatives of the C.I.A. and an untold number of meetings with members of Congress. Unlike others who may be dismayed by this legislation, the A.C.L.U. does more than wring its hands. It actually lobbies. As anyone familiar with that process knows, it usually involves talking to one's antagonists.

Labeling this a "controversial secret meeting" and, thereby, implying that it was furtive and discreditable is bad enough. To make matters worse, however, the editorial goes on to say that it "called to mind the controversy that surrounded a meeting in 1939 of Morris Ernst, counsel for the A.C.L.U., and Martin Dies, chairman of the House Special Committee on Un-American Activities." That analogy is outrageous. It is not certain what transpired between Ernst and Dies, but it appears that they agreed that if the A.C.L.U. cleaned its own house of Communists, the committee would let the A.C.L.U. alone. If such an agreement was reached, it was a betrayal of the principles of the A.C.L.U. It casts doubt on the bona fides of those who helped to remove Elizabeth Gurley Flynn from the A.C.L.U. board a year later on the ostensible ground that, in the wake of the Hitler-Stalin pact, she and other Communists obstructed the A.C.L.U.'s defense of those who did not follow the Communist Party line. (In my view, that would have been very good ground for opposing Flynn's election to the A.C.L.U. board, but not a basis for overturning the results of an election.)

If Ernst had met with Dies in 1939 to work out an agreement for H.S.C.U.A. to observe the principles of due process in its hearings and, simultaneously, to reiterate the A.C.L.U.'s objection to the mandate of the committee, he would have acted legitimately. Under such circumstances, an analogy to the meeting with the C.I.A. on the names-of-agents bill might have been appropriate. As it stands, the analogy is slanderous.

The Nation acknowledges that the A.C.L.U. "is no longer the organization it was during the 1950s." It is important to bear in mind that most of what is known about the misdeeds of A.C.L.U. officials such as Ernst was unearthed and publicized by the A.C.L.U. itself. Many other organizations did similar things during the 1950s, but I am not aware of any other that exposed its own wrongdoing. When drawing distinctions between the A.C.L.U. of the past two decades and the organization as it was previously, this is an essential point to recall.

One final comment: *The Nation* suggests that "the A.C.L.U. and other organizations in the business of defending civil liberties" meet to "thrash out the tactical issues that threaten to divide us." It has been a few years since I was in a position to speak for the A.C.L.U., but, were I now in such a position, I would not see much purpose to such a meeting. The reason is that "other organizations in the business of defending civil liberties" have not seen fit to devote any discernible effort to lobbying Congress about the names-of-agents bill or about any of the other critical matters involving the intelligence agencies that are coming up. The contribution of such organizations, as far as I am able to tell, has been restricted to maligning the A.C.L.U. For my part, I favor discussing lobbying tactics with those actually doing something about pernicious legislation, not with those dispensing slander from the sidelines.

Aryeh Neier

REPLY

Critics of the American Civil Liberties Union's meeting with the Central Intelligence Agency regard it as "secret" in the sense that representatives of other organizations with whom the A.C.L.U. was previously exchanging ideas on how best to oppose the names-of-agents legislation were not apprised of it; that is also why it became controversial. But as we were careful to point out in our editorial, "the issue now, however, is not—or should not be—the performance of the A.C.L.U., which . . . has been in the forefront of the fight to protect the First Amendment." We also pointed out that "an absolute precondition" for a debate on matters of tactics and strategy in the months ahead "is that we keep in sight the source and the nature of the danger. . . . In this climate, there is a compelling need to recognize that the pre-eminent threat to civil liberties today comes not from colleagues with the wrong tactics but from an Administration and a Congress that are poised to do fundamental damage to the Bill of Rights."

—The Editors

Pelham, N.Y.

"Hanging Together" correctly depicts the names-of-agents bill as threatening "fundamental damage to the Bill of Rights." It is for this reason that the Center for National Security Studies, ably led and represented by Morton Halperin and Jerry Berman, has for well over a year led the fight against it. The center, which is jointly sponsored by the Fund for Peace and the American Civil Liberties Union, has been virtually the only liberal group at work on Capitol Hill on this and other national security issues. Outside suggestions and even criticisms are, therefore, all the more valuable. Your editorial, though, is of little help.

A throwaway line like "controversial secret meeting with representatives of the C.I.A." doesn't get uttered in jest, or in *The Nation*, without knowledge of how it will be read. Especially since the A.C.L.U. meeting in 1939 with Martin Dies is recalled, it would have been better if the editorial had said plainly whatever it is you meant.

The editorial goes on to remark that three important questions need to be "carefully addressed," and then leaves readers waiting for answers. One question was whether liberals should sometimes work for the "lesser evil." However *The Nation* may eventually answer, I can say that the center's advisory board, of which I am chairman, has, along with Halperin and Berman, confronted that issue for months, but in a more helpful formulation: how can we keep the damage to the Constitution to a minimum during this present spell of Congressional mania? In the process, the center's staff has made unprecedentedly painstaking efforts to keep other liberal groups informed, stage by stage, of its positions and the reasons for them. Therefore, I defy you to find any evidence to support the charge made, by selective quotation, that the A.C.L.U. has tried to "distance" itself from "least popular victims."

And for the future, we can only hope that *The Nation* will avoid, as well as caution against, bad-faith accusations among liberals, even while we remain committed to open and critical discussions among ourselves.

Leslie Dunbar

REPLY

As we indicated in our editorial, the answers to the questions we have raised are not easy ones, and will require focused debate and consideration in the weeks and months ahead. Leslie Dunbar's request that we document charges against the American Civil Liberties Union should be directed to the editor of Covert Action Information Bulletin, *who made them, rather than to* The Nation, *which reported them.*

—The Editors

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EDITORIALS.

Containing Nukes

It happens every now and again that a thesis put forward by a thoughtful and farsighted individual is immediately confirmed by the behavior of other individuals who belong in neither category. Something of this sort has recently taken place.

In the November 2 issue of *The New Yorker*, George Kennan shared his reflections on "the Soviet problem." He argued for a position that his longtime aficionados will find familiar: that the Soviet Union feels itself threatened and encircled and that its crude foreign policy is more easily explicable in those terms than it is in the weird constructions of Caspar Weinberger. But when he addressed the issue of nuclear weapons, Kennan was perhaps more forthright than he has ever been. He stated the essence of the matter as follows:

> I believe that until we consent to recognize that the nuclear weapons we hold in our own hands are as much a danger to us as those that repose in the hands of our supposed adversaries there will be no escape from the confusions and dilem-

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> mas to which such weapons have now brought us, and must bring us increasingly as time goes on.

Kennan cannot be faulted in this analysis. As he says earlier in his article, the danger lies "not in the number or quality of the weapons or in the intentions of those who hold them but in the very existence of weapons of this nature . . ."

Alexander Haig was able to confirm Kennan's thesis with extraordinary speed. *The New Yorker* had hardly appeared on the stands when he announced the readiness—indeed the eagerness—of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to explode a "demonstration" nuclear bomb in the event of a Soviet incursion into Western Europe. If this bomb is not to be "demonstrated" by exploding it among Soviet tanks and infantry (which would hardly be demonstrative), then it must be detonated in West Germany or, if things are really bad, in Belgium or France or Sweden. Which is to say that a bomb in "our own hands" would be the agency of our own destruction. This would naturally not fail to impress the Kremlin. If we would do that to ourselves, what might we not do to them?

It is possible to criticize Kennan only on one point. Why does he speak of "our" nuclear weapons? The shorthand might be excusable in the work of one less learned, but he should know that "we" were never consulted about the acquisition of these bombs, that the European countries where they will be based found out from the newspapers that this favor was being done to them, that the inhabitants of the atolls where they were tested often found out in even more unpleasant ways.

Still, we should be grateful both to Kennan and to Haig. They remind us of the obvious—that nuclear armament is insane *in itself*, and that no rational scheme for its use can be devised.

History's Witness

Our Fall Books Issue begins with Herbert Gutman's cover story asking, "What happened to history?" A case argued last week in the Federal District Court for the Southern District of New York also deals with history, and our right to know about it. In a suit under the Freedom of Information Act, filed the day after the act took effect more than six years ago, Alger Hiss and William Reuben seek to obtain from the Federal Bureau of Investigation "all documents and records in your files relating to Whittaker Chambers." As their attorney, Victor Rabinowitz, put it:

> Chambers was the principal witness against Hiss and all of the facts concerning him are of primary interest to historians, students and others. . . . It must be recalled that the issue of the veracity, or lack thereof of Chambers's statements to the government concerning his allegations of his and Hiss's involvement in espionage activities is central to the controversy surrounding the Hiss trials.

The question of Alger Hiss's guilt or innocence continues to bedevil those who seek to understand our history—specifically the history of the New Deal, the nature of Communist "underground" activities in Washington and the role of the cold-war witch hunters. Most historians agree that Alger Hiss was guilty of perjury when he denied that he gave government secrets to Chambers. But history's verdict can never be final. And in this case there is one more witness to be heard: Whittaker Chambers, who, despite his and the government's denials at the time, provided testimony on Hiss to the F.B.I., amounting to thousands of pages, which has never been released. These documents, Hiss and Reuben claim, will settle the issue of Chambers's credibility as Hiss's chief accuser. At a time when the air is full of charges about Soviet-directed moles and terrorists of the 1980s, it would be useful to learn the real story of the so-called Red underground of the 1930s. We hope the judge will order the F.B.I. to produce the missing witness.

True Confessions?

On June 9, 1981, in an attack characteristic of the growing persecution of the Roman Catholic Church in Guatemala, five armed men dragged Luis Pellecer Faena, a Jesuit priest, from his car on Calle Octaza, beat him unconscious and spirited him away in a car without license plates, according to eyewitnesses. Pellecer had worked with Catholic youth groups, slum dwellers in Guatemala City and Salvadoran refugees, activities that are disapproved of by the Guatemalan authorities and the city's paramilitary gangs, and so he was a likely victim. Since January, seven priests, including Stanley Rother of Oklahoma City, have disappeared or been killed in Guatemala.

Weeks went by without a sign of Pellecer. The government denied all knowledge of his whereabouts, and many of his colleagues gave him up for dead. Then, on September 30, Guatemalan President Romeo Lucas García invited foreign diplomats, journalists and top government officials to a press conference. Also at the press conference, wearing a gray suit and priest's collar, was Father Pellecer.

"My name is Luis Eduardo Pellecer Faena," he told the packed house. "I am a Jesuit priest, 35 years of age, a native Guatemalan and a member of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor until June 8 of this year, at which time I decided of my own free will to seek out the country's security forces and thereby terminate my subversive, militant existence as part of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor."

For the next hour and a half, Pellecer related how he had used the Church as a cover for his revolutionary activities. He learned, he said, to "manipulate three fundamental weapons": the theology of liberation embraced by the progressive Catholic clergy; the Marxist-Leninist ideology with which all Jesuits are "indoctrinated" during their university study, and the Jesuit orientation toward "the poorest sectors of the world and the urban population."

Pellecer's claims were widely publicized in Guatemala, where the conservative Catholic hierarchy is at odds with the younger, progressive clergy who work at the grass-roots level. At a meeting between Pellecer and Guatemalan bishops shortly before his public appearance, Archbishop

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Mario Casariego of Guatemala seized Pellecer by the lapels and shouted "Judas! Judas!" According to newspaper accounts, Pellecer responded by reciting his press conference speech: "My name is Luis Eduardo Pellecer Faena . . ."

On October 22, in a move that illustrates the growing cooperation among right-wing Central American governments, Pellecer was flown to San Salvador, where he repeated his "confession" at a press conference organized by the Salvadoran armed forces. Again, Pellecer denied that he had been tortured or forced to make his statements, calling the Guatemalan police "true friends and brothers" and "begging forgiveness from the entire nation."

Pellecer's charges have touched off deep concern among Jesuits in Central America because they coincide with a rash of advertisements in the press denouncing the Jesuits. On October 23, César Jerez, the Jesuit Provincial for Central America, said, "The Jesuits cannot accept the validity [of Pellecer's statement] until the circumstances of his confinement [the 135 days he spent in the hands of the Guatemalan government] are clarified."

Frederick Allodi, a University of Toronto psychiatry professor who has had extensive experience treating Latin American torture victims, and who studied videotapes of Pellecer's public appearances, called the case one of "psycho-physiologically forced conversion"—brainwashing, in common parlance—probably brought about by the "total control of Pellecer's social and biological life and support systems." In those circumstances, Allodi said, "basic instincts rule. Survival is to associate, follow instructions, seek love from the source of power. This man has done what most people would do."

In introducing Pellecer to the press, presidential secretary Carlos Toledo Vielman said that the Jesuit "was free to leave [Guatemala] for the country of his choice." Pellecer insists that he is not a prisoner; he claims he is in "protective custody." Why, then, have no independent observers been allowed to see him privately to determine the validity of these claims? CYNTHIA ARNSON

Cynthia Arnson writes regularly for The Nation *on Latin America.*

All Saviours

Recently, along with thousands of other Americans, I attended a solemn church service. On October 2, 1981, groups of believers across the nation gathered in their neighborhood temples of finance, eagerly awaiting their local cleric to perform the laying on of hands. Although the Bowery Savings Bank at Thirty-Fourth Street and Seventh Avenue in New York City, where I worshipped, seemed an unlikely place for a religious service, there, as in thousands of other banks, the coming of a new Messiah was proclaimed—the 12.61 percent "All Savers" certificates. Perhaps they should be called All Saviours. Savers who embrace the new gospel of thrift will be saved; they will enter the Kingdom of Reaganomics, where reward is its own virtue. My fellow votaries and I were participating in the rebirth of old-time American Puritanism, with its odd mixture of greed and piety. But in a decidedly un-Christian way, we were also being delivered, tax-free, from any duty to help the poor.

The advent of the All Saviours did resemble an old-time gospel meeting. Their coming had been heralded for weeks in television and newspaper advertisements, sponsored by as many banks as there are sects in Christendom. Some of these advertisements even promised an amazing grace—interest rates of up to 50 percent for all those who took the pledge before October 1. Our spiritual leaders in Washington, D.C., preached that All Saviours would deliver us from the evil of the declining dollar and usher us into supply-side paradise.

The anointed sacrificed the use of their money for a year and joined a new elect. It was not the exclusive group the Puritans had in mind, since one needed only $500 to be admitted, but an elect nonetheless.

The Puritans taught that worldly success guaranteed admission to heaven, and in the Church of the All Saviours the wealthiest reap the greatest reward—the full $1,000 in interest ($2,000 for married couples). Puritanism eventually succumbed to the Yankee trader's shrewd way with a dollar, and our national civic religion has long taught that to those who have it shall be given. A corollary of that has been a deep suspicion of government. Yet in the eighteenth century, government was regarded as society's instrument for preventing a maldistribution of wealth (not for *redistributing* wealth—a different matter), which the Founding Fathers believed was a primary cause of social unrest. Under Reaganomics, "voluntarism," sweetened by high interest rates, has replaced government; to the new elect, taxation with representation is just as onerous as taxation without representation was to our forefathers.

The redistributive changes in the 1981 tax law should be called Reaganocracy, rather than Reaganomics, and we who benefit from them should be called Reagancrats. If what my local high priest of finance prophesied comes true, Congress will transform a one-time conversion into an annual ritual, and the All Saviours elect will become permanent. It has been reported that the tax losses from All Saviours in 1981 will be higher than the $3 billion originally predicted. Such a loss in revenues would, of course, necessitate even further cutbacks in the national budget, which would fall mainly upon the nonelect, i.e., the poor.

Reaganomics has thus enabled the government to despoil the poor by transferring wealth to the rich. The new religion of All Saviours uses the government to confer an additional benefit on the elect. For an Administration that has renounced the use of tax policy as an instrument for redistributing wealth, this is a startling turnaround. All Saviours will sanctify the few, starve the public purse and distort the role of modern government. ISIDORE SILVER

Isidore Silver is a professor of constitutional law and history at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice of the City University of New York.

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DISPATCHES.

■ EAST TIMOR: A Skeleton in Portugal's Closet

As the Portuguese were hastily withdrawing from East Timor, their Southeast Asian colony, six years ago, Indonesian troops moved in and annexed it. As many as 300,000 East Timorese are believed to have died as a result of the Indonesian invasion, the famine in its wake and the counterinsurgency war that is still going on. Despite the efforts of Massachusetts Institute of Technology Prof. Noam Chomsky and several Australian journalists and diplomats, the tragedy in East Timor has been ignored in the West. Few Third World governments have dared to condemn Indonesia, one of the pillars of the nonaligned movement. And in Portugal, the country whose precipitous departure set the stage for the massacre, East Timor has been consigned to official oblivion.

Late last month, however, the corpse was exhumed in the form of a declassified document titled "East Timor Report," which criticized the Portuguese military for its failure to prevent the Indonesian invasion. The report also revealed that Mário Soáres, Portugal's Prime Minister at the time, did virtually nothing to dissuade Indonesia from its aggression. Many people in Portugal still regard East Timor as the most shameful episode in the dismantling of Portugal's 500-year-old empire, and so the release of the report, the existence of which had been made known in earlier leaks to the press, has touched off a national debate on Portugal's role in the debacle. The key question is: Did the Soáres government merely acquiesce in Indonesia's "inevitable" takeover of East Timor, or was its role one of direct complicity?

The publication of the report could not have been better timed. At recent U.N. hearings on decolonization, José Ramos-Horta—the representative of East Timor's independence movement, Fretilin—warned that Indonesia was preparing for another military offensive in East Timor. Noting that the only remaining Westerners in the territory—an International Red Cross team—had recently been withdrawn, Horta contended that there would be no foreign witnesses to any Indonesian assault. Predicting that an invasion would lead to more starvation, the Fretilin leader appealed for emergency humanitarian aid.

■ RUMANIA: The Convert in the East

The dramatic surge in Western Europe's nuclear disarmament movement—highlighted by demonstrations last month in Britain, West Germany, Belgium, Italy and France—has shaken the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Reagan Administration. Even the Chinese are worried that their dream of a grand anti-Soviet alliance with the United States, Japan and Western Europe is jeopardized by the burgeoning opposition to nuclear arms in Europe. "A number of pacifists and neutralists in Western Europe have entertained strange illusions," a Peking radio commentator complained recently. "They believe that the aggressive Soviet plan for armed expansion can only be thwarted through negotiations."

Ironically, China's only friend among the Warsaw Pact nations is Rumania, whose President, Nicolae Ceausescu, has also called for European nuclear disarmament. While hundreds of thousands of antinuclear protesters were marching through the capitals of Western Europe, Ceausescu made a surprising appeal for the withdrawal of all nuclear weapons from the Continent. In an interview with the West German newspaper *Rundschau*, the Rumanian leader emphatically announced his opposition to NATO's plans to install 572 Pershing-2 and cruise missiles in Western Europe. And, more surprisingly, Ceausescu openly broke with Soviet policy by calling for the withdrawal of Soviet SS-20 missiles and other nuclear weapons from Eastern Europe.

"We are of the view that it is above all necessary to do everything to stop the deployment of the new medium-range weapons and of all nuclear weapons in Europe," Ceausescu said. "That applies both to the stopping of the deployment of those missiles produced by the United States and to the withdrawal of the Soviet missiles." Other Warsaw Pact countries have backed the Soviet proposal for a freeze on further deployment of the SS-20 missiles if NATO cancels its plans to install Euromissiles, but none has gone so far as to advocate the complete withdrawal of Soviet nuclear missiles.

Ceausescu's ability to conduct foreign policy independently of the Soviet Union is undoubtedly limited, but his statements in *Rundschau* provided Western Europe's disarmament movement with a welcome opening to the East, however small.

■ BRITAIN: Will There Always Be an England?

With 3 million people in Britain unemployed, many of the Asians and West Indians who migrated there in search of a better life after World War II now find themselves mired in poverty and hopelessness. Their dreams went up in smoke in last summer's riots. The vast majority of Third World immigrants, and most of the white working class as well, have nowhere else to go. But many British professionals and skilled workers, who have also been hurt by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's slash-and-burn economic policies, do have the option of leaving their country. And a rapidly increasing number of disillusioned Britons are doing just that—escaping to Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United States and even South Africa in search of high-paying jobs and lower taxes. The rush to emigrate among engineers, nurses, computer specialists, managers and other skilled workers threatens to become a stampede, and many in Britain are starting to be alarmed.

Last year, 229,000 people emigrated from Britain, and, according to a recent report by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, this year the outflow will be much greater. Already, more people are leaving the country than are entering it as immigrants. In 1980, Britain suffered a net loss in population of 55,000, the largest number since the recession of the mid-1970s.

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ELIZABETH FARNSWORTH AND STEPHEN TALBOT

The Australian Embassy in London has been deluged with applications to immigrate—125,000 of them this year alone; Canada is currently processing some 22,000 British immigrants. Both countries advertise in Britain for skilled workers, promising attractive salaries. South Africa even offers to pay 80 percent of the one-way air fare from London to Johannesburg (whites only need apply).

Ironically, one reason that countries like Australia can offer jobs to economically hard-pressed Britons is that so much British capital has been invested abroad instead of being used to renovate outmoded industrial facilities at home. According to *The Financial Times* of London, Britain is Australia's largest source of foreign capital, accounting for 35 percent of all foreign investment in Australian enterprises. British investors have been abandoning their country for years; now frustrated middle-class professionals are following suit.

■ SWEDEN: "Dig Where You Stand"

Sven Lindquist's book *Dig Where You Stand: How to Research a Job* has had an impact that most writers can only dream about. Published in 1978, the book is now in its third printing in Sweden, and Danish, Norwegian and German adaptations will soon be available. Some 1,500 workplace "Dig Where You Stand" groups have been formed since the book's publication, and it has actually changed the way things are done in some Swedish factories.

The book was inspired partly by China's "Dig the Bitter Roots" campaign, which Lindquist studied while he spent several years working in China. A more immediate impetus, though, were the difficulties he encountered researching the life of his grandfather, a cement worker. "All the books on the cement industry were written by shareholders," Lindquist told us in New York last month. "They told me nothing about the nature of my grandfather's work, or about his daily life. I decided to use the cement industry and my grandfather's job as an example and to describe for blue-collar workers how to research the history of their jobs."

Essentially a manual, *Dig Where You Stand* lists thirty publicly available sources of information about the history of an occupation. "The book makes an explicit comparison," Lindquist said, "between workers and shareholders. It asks the question: What did the worker leave when he died, and how does this compare with the estate of a major stockholder?"

"Dig Where You Stand" groups are now familiar on the Swedish labor scene. In an asbestos factory in Lomma, one group talked with retired workers who suffered from lung diseases and found that the company had consistently lied about the dangers of working with asbestos, although it had known about them since the turn of the century. A law suit was filed, and many affected workers received cash settlements. Other "Dig Where You Stand" groups have begun similar legal actions seeking compensation for job-related injuries.

Because research sources differ from country to country, the book cannot be directly translated. An adaptation for Britain is in the works, and Lindquist hopes a U.S. edition will be published.

■ UPDATE: Abertura in Brazil

Military rulers in Brazil who support *abertura*—the "opening up" of Brazilian politics—have confronted many obstacles, but none so formidable as the opposition emanating from the country's ubiquitous intelligence services. The May Day eve bombing outside a Rio de Janeiro concert hall [see Dispatches, June 27], in which two members of the Brazilian Army's intelligence service were implicated, was evidence of the opposition's determination. The goal of the army's hard-liners in this terrorist campaign—there have been at least forty bombings of leftist or liberal targets since mid-1979—was evidently to strike a blow against *abertura* and particularly to intimidate anyone with the temerity to suggest that those guilty of past tortures should be brought to trial.

The bombing and the ensuing dispute over the extent of the government's inquiry into it forced out in the open the power struggle among Brazil's military leaders over *abertura*. The key architect of the liberalization process, Gen. Golbery do Couto e Silva, chief of staff to President João Baptista Figueiredo, pressed for a complete investigation as a deterrent to further terrorism by recalcitrant members of the intelligence agencies, which Golbery himself helped create in 1967. The "communidade de informacões," which employs about 200,000 Brazilians, is made up of twenty separate organizations. "I have created a monster," Golbery has admitted. "Things cannot continue like this."

For the time being, however, the "monster" is likely to remain loose. Golbery lost his battle for a full inquiry into the Rio bombing; after further defeats, he resigned in early August. Since his departure, the hard-liners in the government, notably Gen. Otávio Medeiros, who heads the National Intelligence Service, have strengthened their positions. Last month, during an inquiry into the May Day eve bombing, several independent members of the Superior Military Tribunal charged that there had been an official cover-up. But the tribunal voted to shelve its probe, and the intelligence community retained its de facto immunity to prosecution. President Figuereido himself is said to have agreed to the cover-up in the interest of getting on with what he views as a more important phase of *abertura*, the first direct congressional and gubernatorial elections to be held in Brazil in fifteen years, which are scheduled for 1982.

But the "secret government" of the intelligence community is unlikely to permit completely democratic elections or anything else that might threaten its power. Herein lies the dilemma implicit in attempts to transform an "authoritarian" dictatorship into an open, democratic system.

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CALVIN TRILLIN

Thumbing through *The New York Times Magazine* one Sunday, noticing that more and more designers like Ralph Lauren and Bill Blass and Oscar de la Renta are appearing in advertisements for their own brands of clothing, I was struck so suddenly with an inspiration that I blurted it out to my wife, Alice: "Victor S. Navasky should appear in ads for *The Nation*," I said. "Standing with his foot on the corral fence, next to one of those blond models who look like they're too sophisticated to eat dinner."

"Victor!" Alice said. "In *that* suit?"

"He wouldn't be peddling shmatas," I said. "We're talking about a journal of opinion here. Journalists are supposed to be a bit seedy, and you have to admit that Navasky is very opinionated looking. He looks like he holds a number of opinions that other people gave up a long time ago."

"If this is another plot to embarrass Victor just because you think he's underpaying you, I want you to forget it immediately," Alice said. "It's not his fault he doesn't look like a male model."

"But that's just the point," I said. "Neither do those designers. Does Ralph Lauren strike you as someone who used to be a lifeguard?"

"Well, no," Alice acknowledged. "In fact, it's always seemed to me that Oscar de la Renta looks like a ruffle with legs."

"As it happens, Victor S. Navasky has an athletic past—he was on the basketball team at Elisabeth Irwin High School," I said, repeating an old and unconvincing Navasky claim that I figured I could pass off as true because Alice has never seen him play basketball. Years ago, Navasky and I both played in a weekly Sunday morning basketball game at the Gansevoort Street Playground in the West Village, but Alice had always declined my invitations to attend. "I don't know much about basketball," she used to say, "and I'm afraid I'll laugh at the wrong time."

"It isn't meant to be funny at all," I would tell her—another statement I thought I might get away with because she had never seen Navasky play.

Navasky was dreadful. I don't mean he received no awards at the annual banquet we held in the spring at the Paradise Inn of the Green Olive Tree, on Forty-First Street. We had a number of awards that had nothing to do with skill—Most Improved Jewish Player, for instance, and The Roy Cohn Award for the Most Specious Out of Bounds Argument. His playing was such, though, that the only reason the rest of us agreed among ourselves to quit scoffing at his story of having played on the high school basketball team was to prevent him from wearing his letter sweater, to the embarrassment of his family and friends.

Being unusually charitable about such matters, I finally managed to devise a theory that might explain how an American high school could have had Victor S. Navasky as a member of its basketball team—a theory based on the assumption that Elisabeth Irwin, a Greenwich Village school with a progressive reputation, must have been full of children from left-wing families. It seems possible to me that in order to avoid sectarian disputes at P.T.A. meetings, the basketball coach might have tried to give the teams a fair balance of all sorts of players—a few Trotskyites, a couple of Stalinist forwards, a Schachtmanite with a passable jump shot, maybe an energetic guard who couldn't hit the basket but had a grandfather who had been a Left S.R. in the old country. Navasky, I figured, must have been editing the Elisabeth Irwin newspaper, charging his writers their lunch money for the opportunity of getting into print, and he was put on the second five as the Token Exploiter.

"How about a campus scene?" I said to Alice the next day. "Navasky's in a sweater—not his E.I. letter sweater but one of those gigantic Irish fisherman's sweaters that male models can wear to Sunday brunch in a steam-heated New York apartment once they've had their sweat glands surgically removed. He's reading *The Nation*. His foot's on a corral fence—because there happens to be a corral on this campus—and he's so engrossed he doesn't notice that all of these dynamite coeds are staring at him with a desperate longing. Some of them have long, straight hair, so they look a little left wing, except for being such knockouts.

"I can't believe you're doing this," Alice said.

"Or maybe Navasky's on a beach," I said. "In gauzy color. He's wearing one of those alligator polo shirts, except it's got a peace sign or a Red Star or something where the alligator's supposed to be. He's reading *The Nation*, and so are all of these marvelous-looking people on the beach—everyone but the lifeguard, this wonky little guy who looks something like Ralph Lauren."

"I think you're being awful," Alice said. "You can't compare Victor to some dress designer. He's a serious person, except for that suit."

"But dress designers are not the only people appearing in their own ads now," I said. "What about Frank Perdue—with all those ads about how it takes a tough man to produce a tender chicken? Is that your idea of a glamorpuss? What about that Carvel ice cream guy with the voice they make political prisoners in Central America listen to until they agree to confess to being in the pay of the Kremlin? It's just that I prefer to envision Navasky in an Irish fisherman's sweater."

"I won't have Victor discussed as if he were a ruffle," Alice said.

"Maybe you're right," I said. "We could do a sort of Perdue-style ad for *The Nation*. There's Navasky, dressed up like Edward Arnold playing the big industrialist in one of those 1940s movies, and writers are slaving away all around him—all of them dressed in dismal clothes and needing haircuts and looking undernourished."

"I don't see the point," Alice said.

"The caption, of course: 'It Takes a Real Exploiter of the Workers to Run a Left-Wing Magazine.'"

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BOOKS & THE ARTS.

'The Esthetic View of Death'

LESLEY HAZLETON

ART OF THE HOLOCAUST. *By Janet Blatter and Dr. Sybil Milton. The Rutledge Press. 272 pp. $29.95.*

THE AUSCHWITZ ALBUM: A Book Based Upon an Album Discovered by a Concentration Camp Survivor, Lilly Meier. *Text by Peter Hellman. Random House. $23.50.*

CHARLOTTE: LIFE OR THEATER? *By Charlotte Salomon. Translated from the German by Leila Vennewitz. The Viking Press. 784 pp. $75.*

I have three coffee-table books. They are on the Holocaust. Yes, coffee-table books.

Of course, the question is one of taste. "Taste and the Holocaust." It sounds like a new course at the sort of college where you meet your friends for coffee between "Death and Dying" and "The Holocaust Experience."

Any talk about taste and the Holocaust runs the risk of tastelessness. But with these coffee-table books in front of me, I am forced to run that risk. If it were only a question of taste, I wouldn't bother with them. But taste is always symptomatic. The real question is what we are doing to the Holocaust, and why.

This is what we've managed in the last few years: The whole world followed the televised fortunes and misfortunes of the Weiss family, and only a few unconscionable snobs were unfeeling enough to mention the word soap. Reviewers waxed lyrical as Vanessa Redgrave displayed her high principles over a piece of sausage in *Playing for Time*. They marveled at the degree to which soap can be carved into literature by the likes of William Styron. And they giggled excitedly along with Vincent Canby when *The Night Porter* was dragged out for a rerun and advertised as "a kinky turn-on."

America is still "doing" the Holocaust. It took more than a generation to make it assimilable. Now we can't get enough of it. And in the rush to catharsis, we ignore the fact that we are trying as hard as we can to "work through it" so that we can simply forget. We are busily making the Holocaust over into the equivalent of a personal problem. Then, by experiencing it, simulating it, "catharting" it and working through it, we can "solve" it in the best tradition of instant therapies.

And yet there is also a vested interest in prolonging this particular therapeutic endeavor. Agents, packagers, salesmen and the others behind the commercialization of the Holocaust are hard at work dreaming up new "angles." I remember thinking that a soap opera was the worst of what could come; I shouldn't have underestimated the inventiveness of a salesman who has created a market. The new flock of coffee-table books has glossed up and glossed over the Holocaust for readers of *The New York Times* Living Section. Nothing is sacred to commercial good taste.

The Auschwitz Album, for instance, will be published later this year by Random House and sold at the relatively low price of $23.50. Yes, it's a photograph album: 190 photographs of arrival and selection at Auschwitz II, otherwise known as Birkenau, taken by an S.S. guard and discovered by a survivor after liberation. The album bore the inscription "as a remembrance of your dear and unforgettable and faithful Heinz."

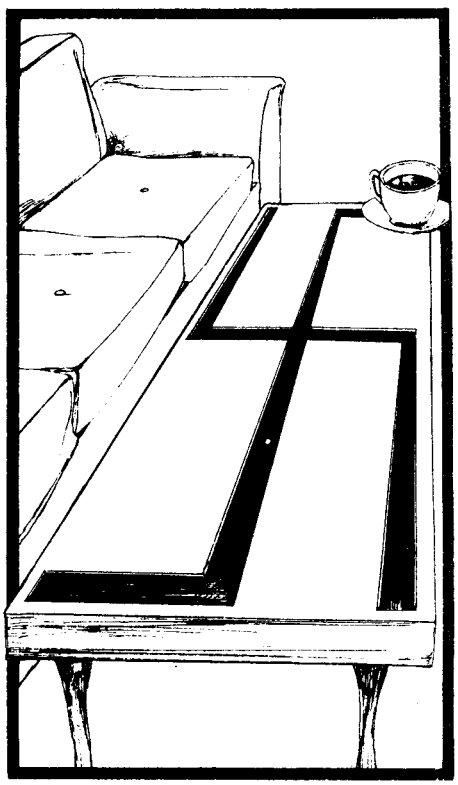
These photographs were presented as evidence at the 1964 Frankfurt trial of Auschwitz guards, and the judge said: "Strange gifts they gave each other." What, then, are we to say about those who now give copies of this album as gifts to one another? In what way are they different from that S.S. guard Heinz?

I look at the photographs. I stare at the people about to die. There is no new information here. Some of the photographs have already been published. They show people herded together and standing in lines. Some are standing in line for selection: one way to forced labor, the other to the gas chambers. The photographs show them marching to the gas chambers. They show them in front of the innocuous-looking building that houses the gas chambers, unaware of what is inside.

They have a certain emotional power, yes. But the disturbing question is whether that comes from sorrow or pity, or from the same vicarious thrill that Heinz experienced—the thrill induced by the fact that the viewer knows what those in the photographs do not, that violent death is imminent, inevitable, inescapable.

The difference between ourselves and Heinz seems to be that we come to this album with the comforting—and false—assurance of our moral superiority to the photographer. No one knows who Heinz was or whether he still lives, but if he is alive, he must be delighted. It must be all he can do not to rush in and claim his share of the royalties. After all, who would ever have thought that this sly little present to his lover would have ended up on coffee tables in fashionable America?

These photographs do not belong in the ease and comfort of home. They belong in Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial museum in Jerusalem, to which they were presented in 1980. There, the overwhelming accumulation of evidence and documentation and the



DRAWINGS BY KIMBERLY BULCKEN

Lesley Hazleton is a British-Israeli journalist and author, most recently, of Where Mountains Roar: A Personal Report from the Sinai and Negev Desert *(Penguin).*

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sparse bleakness of the place itself combine to evoke the awe, the fear and the horror of evil that can be the only truly human response to what happened. When we bind these photographs for our coffee tables, we alter them. We make the awful into our own image of middle-class respectability. We replace horror with sentimentality.

Take *The Art of the Holocaust*, available from The Rutledge Press for $29.95. Some will argue that this collection of work done by artists during the Holocaust is important for documentary purposes. But the Nazis' own films recorded far more, especially since, in the worst of the killing camps, few artists, no matter how resourceful, could find material *and* use it *and* insure that their work would survive. Most of the drawings presented here were done in other camps, many in the transit camps. And many of those that were done in the killing camps were commissioned by the Nazis themselves: the price of the artist's staying alive.

Artistically, some are good, most are unremarkable, some are simply bad. The editors maintain that artistic quality is not the right criterion for such work, that one should instead admire the tenacity of the artists who kept working no matter what the odds. They are right. But then why try, as does Janet Blatter in a long introductory essay, to place the work within an artistic tradition? And why describe it, as she does, as "an incredible collection, whose power is undeniable and whose overall impression is one of strange beauty"?

I beg to differ. I find no strange beauty in these sketches of camp life, only dehumanization. There is no beauty in dehumanization. I do not find power either; the power that does exist is supplied by my own awareness of the Holocaust. And no, it is not incredible. It is credible, it is human, and that is the virtue of this book—that it is human in the very weakness of its art, that artists felt the need to work, to record, to draw, no matter what. As Irving Howe puts it in the preface, in which he inveighs against the commercialization of the Holocaust: "We have drawings and pictures from people who suffered about the Holocaust, but I see strong reasons for not talking about the 'art' of the Holocaust."

I agree, but then I did not write a preface to a book called *Art of the Holocaust*. Howe did.

Howe also argues that we must cherish every scrap of testimony about the Holocaust, including these works. True, but in what way? The fact is that when you take a tiny sketch done on both sides of a scrap of tissue paper with a blunt pencil under risk of death—done this way because the scrap of tissue was all there was to draw on, the blunt pencil all there was to draw with and purchased on the camp black market at the cost of days of rations—when you take that scrap of paper, lift the image from it and reproduce it on heavy, glossy paper in an "art" format, you take away the very essence of it, everything that made it admirable. You take away its very flimsiness, its stunning courage and defiance, and make it into just another unremarkable sketch.

When the Holocaust comes so beautifully bound and presented, we lose the sense of dirt and degradation. It is not the art that should speak to us so much as the conditions under which it was done. And one cannot get further from those conditions than the coffee table.

The lushest and the most expensive in the new Holocaust genre, at least so far, is an even clearer case of exploitation. It is called *Charlotte: Life or Theater?* and comes to us at a daunting $75, in full color, from Viking. *Charlotte* is plainly weird. It is the life history, told by her own paintings, of a young art student named Charlotte Salomon, who took refuge from the Nazis in the south of France for two years, used the time to make these paintings and was then deported to Auschwitz, where she died. There is nothing of the camps in this book. Again, the poignancy (yes, we have reduced the Holocaust to poignancy) comes from our awareness of her fate. Our own knowledge and sentimentality is being manipulated, not by Charlotte but by the editors and publishers of this tome.

Her work is a strange and interesting blend of Jules Feiffer, Vincent van Gogh, Marc Chagall and Amadeo Modigliani. It is presented as a visual play in acts, scenes and chapters, an idea that came from the Svengali in her life, Alfred Wolfsohn. Wolfsohn, whom she calls Amadeus Daberlohn in the "play," was one of those odd semimystic intellectual characters thrown up by a decadent European society, full of weird and wonderful theories of life and art. To a few, he was a charismatic genius; to most, he was a self-deceived charlatan. He maintained affairs with both Charlotte and her stepmother, an opera singer, at the same time. Charlotte adored her stepmother, resented her and struggled with depression. Throughout her account, it is clear that suicide might have brought an end to her life if the Nazis had not.

The book is a fascinating curiosity: 769 full-color reproductions, with the script written over the paintings. It's rather like a visual counterpart of the new "self-exploration diary" movement. An interesting technique, certainly. But worth $75? Had it not been for her death in Auschwitz, it would never have seen publication. And had Anne Frank not lived, it would also not have been published: it exists because there is room in the market for a painterly Anne Frank.

So we look through the book and we sigh at the loss of talent, safe in the assumption that the loss of an artist is a greater loss than that of a road sweeper or a mailman. Art is good; clean roads and mail deliveries are merely necessary. The Nazis made the distinction, often keeping artists alive in the camps to produce official art for

EQUAL RIGHTS:
The Male Stake
Leo Kanowitz

University of New Mexico Press
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87131

Leo Kanowitz's *Women and the Law: The Unfinished Revolution* (1969) virtually created the legal discipline of sex discrimination and the law. This new book is a compilation of his essays written between 1970 and 1980—many of them specifically for this volume—on a variety of topics relating to the equal rights movement. The overriding concerns of the book are the issue of benign sex discrimination and the idea that the movement for equal rights before the law must be understood as a movement for human rights, not just women's rights. 200 pages $19.95 cloth $9.95 paper

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them. We make the same distinction.

But more repulsive than this by far is the whole attempt to present the Holocaust within an esthetic framework. This is what Jean Amery, in his brilliant essay "At the Mind's Limits" (in a book with the same title), calls "the esthetic view of death." But, as Amery writes, the camps led to the collapse of this view of death: "No bridge led from death in Auschwitz to *Death in Venice*."

In the rush to "work through" the Holocaust, books like Amery's have been largely ignored. They demand too much thought. They refuse to pander to sentimentality. They look nakedly at the world. And though that would seem to be the only way to look at the Holocaust, it is not what today's market requires.

Listen to Amery:

> We did not become wiser in Auschwitz. . . . We perceived nothing there that we would not already have been able to perceive on the outside; not a bit of it brought us practical guidance. . . . We did not become 'deeper'. . . . We did not become better, more human, more humane, more mature ethically. You do not observe dehumanized man committing his deeds and misdeeds without having all of your notions of inherent human dignity placed in doubt.

Who are we, then, to search for experience, knowledge and understanding in the Holocaust? What hubris do we bring to it? What shallowness, sentimentality and sententious declarations about human dignity in the face of hell? In our rush to understand, we still cannot bring ourselves to face the fact that one learns nothing from being dehumanized. In mythicizing denigration, we denigrate ourselves.

I have had too much of the Holocaust festival. Too much of seeing serious books that might give some true understanding of "what it was like" pulled off the shelves to make way for packaged images. Too much of having my heartstrings pulled and tugged in easy directions while the survivors still tell me "But you cannot understand." The Holocaust has been exploited to the point where even those who maintain that it never happened can get a serious hearing; to where a group such as the Jewish Defense League can use it as a rationale for terrorism and racism; to where its reality has given way to a terrible romanticization. We have lost all sense of limits. □

Chiming and Striking

NORA SAYRE

SELECTED LETTERS OF JAMES THURBER. *Edited by Helen Thurber & Edward Weeks. Little, Brown and Company. 274 pp. $15.*

A memory: the man with yolks streaming from his fingers, which he had accidentally dipped into the heart of his eggs Benedict; his hands were too slippery to grasp a fork, and egg decked his lapels. Laughing and gasping, he repeated, "Oh, this is incredible—what is happening to me?" in tones of mock lamentation, while he pantomimed drowning in a wave of egg. As long as he could employ blindness for comedy, he did so; that gallantry persisted, although of course the ruined eyesight deepened the profound depressions that were natural to him.

During the egg scene, I recalled how I'd roared in childhood when he reproduced the terrible sounds that his brother had made on first experiencing buttermilk. Encounters—with unfriendly food, or machinery, or objects that took on a life of their own—were essential to his vision of human existence as an obstacle race. The Thurber man's feeling of helplessness when faced with collapsing cots, stalled cars, computers gone berserk, falling ceilings, malign plumbing, situations beyond control, marriages, ghosts in the attic and global war had to seem hilarious—since the author's own perception of chaos was sometimes unbearable. As Graham Greene wrote about Charlie Chaplin, "The man who falls downstairs must suffer if we are to laugh; the waiter who breaks a plate must be in danger of dismissal. Human nature demands humiliation, the ignoble pain and the grotesque tear: the madhouse for Malvolio." No one understood that better than James Thurber.

I cannot read the Thurber letters objectively, since I know some of what lurks between the lines—mainly in the realm of his own suffering. Besides, who could be objective about a person who conspired to keep one up long past bedtime, concocting stories that the adults yearned to hear, but which he refused to tell "in the absence of a child." I accused him of cheating when we played with a Ouija board, but forgave him when a few of the words he invented appeared in *The White Deer*. It's true that he was often difficult and could be savage, and that his last years were agonizing for his intimates. But, in all that's been written about him, too little has been said about his unbridled loyalty to friends, especially when they were in trouble; as Thurber wrote of John O'Hara, "he would go through smoke and flame for a friend, and often has." Attuned to the perilous balance between health and sickness, he nurtured the sanity of others—not only through his writing but in the psychic support he offered throughout an illness or a crisis. The fount of his stamina was Helen Thurber, his second wife; recurrently, they shared their talents for survival with their friends.

The kinship between wit and dejection always intrigued him; as he noted in the preface to *My Life and Hard Times*, "The little wheels of [comedy] are set in motion by the damp hand of melancholy." (In conclusion, he acknowledged that "the claw of the seapuss gets us all in the end.") His often gleeful pessimism is reflected in the *Selected Letters*, meticulously edited by Helen Thurber and Edward Weeks. One of the most engaging missives is a rumination sent to Wolcott Gibbs concerning the miseries of theatrical production:

> On the thirteenth day of rehearsal the play suddenly makes no sense to you. . . . You wonder why you wrote it and have a wild intention to ask the producer to postpone it a year. In this state you are likely to fall into the orchestra pit or to find yourself taking an actress to Jackson Heights in a cab.

Opening night is even more horrific. At the beginning of the third act, the author realizes that all the actors are whispering and that the action is dragging:

> You will then be sure that they are doing the first act over again. This is because of third-act eardrum, which makes everything sound dim and causes important lines to sound like "Did you find the foursome in the two

Nora Sayre, a former film critic for The New York Times, *is the author of* Sixties Going on Seventies *(Arbor House). Her latest book is* Running Time: Films of the Cold War, *forthcoming from Dial in April 1982.*

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> green bags?" It is now time to go to the bar again, where you will find a large man in a tuxedo, who walked out on the play.

The playwright returns to the theater and sees a prominent critic rushing out for his deadline: "He will say something to you that sounds like 'Organ recital; vested fever.'" After the first night of *The Male Animal*, which Thurber wrote with Elliott Nugent, Marc Connelly said that the production resembled an inferior performance of Brahms's Fifth Symphony. "Fortunately for us, there isn't any Brahms' Fifth. This is the only real comfort I can give you."

Still, there was solace in paradox. When a friend's novel received mixed reviews, Thurber wrote to him about the world premiere of César Franck's D-minor Symphony in 1894: "Fifty percent of the audience cheered at the end and the others booed, tore up auditorium seats, and fenced the other side with walking sticks. The piece is now known as 'the keystone of modern symphonic music.'" As his eyesight ebbed, he pondered the dexterity of the handicapped: "I saw an armless woman in a movie short wrapping bundles with her feet, and having more fun than you and I have with our hands. Furthermore, I have been spared the sight of television."

Although the Thurber man was usually meek, that essence was alien to the writer: "A little crotch-kicking is a good thing, if done in anger. I can't stand guys who are merely piqued by the unforgivable. . . ." While there is more of the genial Thurber than the fierce one in these letters, many of them muse on the painful complexities of writing. When E.B. White was smitten with doubts about his work, Thurber was almost as anxious as if the setback were his own. However, there was apt to be some teasing:

> As far as I can make out, what you have is sheep blast. It comes from an admixture of Comment writing and whisk broom catchings. You look [it] up under "blast" in the dictionary. It really is a flatulent condition of certain sheep, and this is unusual because sheep have almost no diseases. You couldn't give a sheep syphilis, for instance. . . . [In England] everybody turns Catholic when anything is the matter, and perhaps you should try that. T. S. Eliot turned Catholic and so did Evelyn Waugh, and they look fine.

The letters bestow the gift of spending twenty-six years in Thurber's company, of learning what engrossed or appalled him. The focus ranges from telepathy to bloodhounds, revering Henry James, and aging: "With sixty staring me in the face, I have developed inflammation of the sentence structure and a definite hardening of the paragraphs." Small astonishments were perpetually rewarding: Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt referred to the Russian Revolution as "that time they shot all my nice friends," and Sinclair Lewis was "the only drunken writer I ever met who said nothing about his own work and praised that of another writer present." There were periodic rebellions against inert language: "I loathe the expression 'What makes him tick.' . . . A person not only ticks, he also chimes and strikes the hour, falls and breaks and has to be put together again, and sometimes stops like an electric clock in a thunderstorm." In light of all he knew about breaking and stopping, he was convinced that "humor is counterbalance. . . . The power that created the poodle, the platypus, and people has an integrated sense of both comedy and tragedy."

Thurber rejected Gertrude Stein's concept of the Lost Generation: "We weren't lost. We knew where we were, all right, but we wouldn't go home. Ours was the generation that stayed up all night. Indeed, we spent so little time in bed most of us had only one child. . . . No wonder so many of my generation have died before the age of sixty-five." Contemplating the casualties among New York writers, he compared Bleeck's, the journalists' bar, to "a front-line dugout" in World War I: "the noise, the dogged courage of the

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men holding on till zero hour, the fits of hysteria, the sitting around in sullen gloom. The women are like the shattered trees of Verdun or the shells whistling overhead." For Thurber, the awareness of self-destruction was as pungent as the sense of an irrational universe; in responding to cosmic cruelty, there was the danger of lacerating oneself.

To his ophthalmologist and eye surgeon, he wrote about the parallels between his optical illusions—"golden sparks, melting purple blobs" and other wonders—and those reported by devout Christians whom he suspected of confusing their "retinal disturbances with holy visitation." He felt that hundreds of deluded people had taken "their glory to the bishop rather than the eye doctor," and added, "I am a believer in miracles, since my own vision is a miracle, but I am opposed to people who can't tell one illusion from another." He continued to ridicule his vanquished eyes even after the devastating sieges in hospitals—in 1941, he had four eye operations in four months without general anesthesia—but he also wanted to write an extremely serious article about the care and protection of the eye. Yet his attention rarely strayed from literary matters. Editors who condensed books for digest magazines must persuade themselves "that there are too many lines in a sonnet and too many stars . . . in the flag," and he celebrated the brevity of the novella: "it is a length that annoys publishers, I hope."

In Thurber's obituary in *The New Yorker*, E. B. White wrote, "His waking dreams and his sleeping dreams commingled shamelessly and uproariously." That conjunction wasn't confined to the published fables and fantasies. In 1958, after a lengthy manuscript which friends had criticized had been rewritten several times, Thurber thanked White for his advice, observing, "Every long writing project of mine has been saved finally by my unconscious, the soundest critic I know. A week ago I dreamed I was sitting on a curb and picked up a muddy thing the shape of a gibbous croquet ball. When I got the mud off, there was a small clean crystal chalice. . . ." The letters reveal how clearly he could see in his sleep, and the host of magnificent drawings that enrich the book resurrect the eye and the hand and the mind that died exactly twenty years ago—which now seem more inspired than ever. □

'The Awful Rowing'

KATHA POLLITT

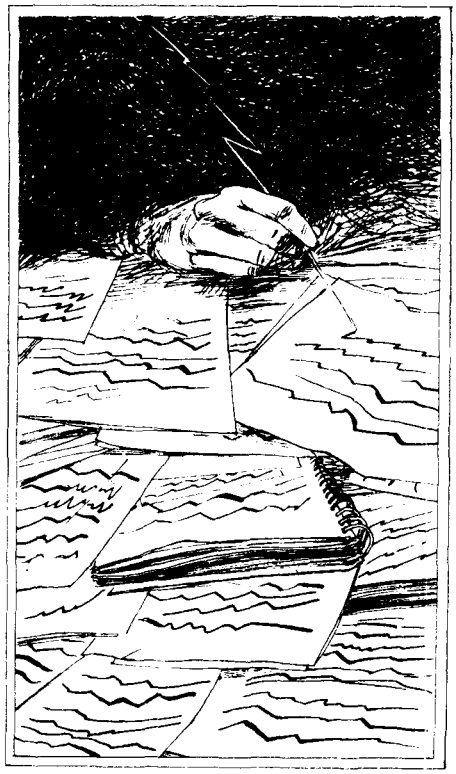
THE COMPLETE POEMS. *By Anne Sexton. Houghton Mifflin Company. 622 pp. $20.*

Like Sylvia Plath, with whom she is often paired, Anne Sexton arouses strong feelings of popular adulation and critical unease. How could it have been otherwise? At a time when American poetry was nearly as male-dominated as football, she wrote frankly, extravagantly and without apology about the experience of women. Scarcely less important, she was a democrat practicing the most snobbish of arts. While most of her colleagues were scholars and critics and translators with university affiliations, she was a junior-college dropout and suburban matron who began writing poetry after watching a television program called *How to Write a Sonnet*. With her recurrent bouts of madness, her suicide attempts (she finally succeeded in 1974), her flamboyant sexuality and her vibrant physical presence on the poetry-reading circuit, she fit as no poet since Dylan Thomas the popular stereotype of the self-destructive genius—beautiful, damned and oh-so-sensitive. It was a role she exploited to the hilt. Her books, exhaustively documenting her painful childhood, difficult marriage and mental breakdowns, sold 20,000 copies and more; she published poems in *Playboy*; she gave readings to packed auditoriums with a rock group backing her up. Lowell, Jarrell and Snodgrass had readers; Sexton had fans.

Time has muted the appeal of this image. Suicide and madness are less voguish these days, for one thing—perhaps the public self-destruction of so many postwar poets, male and female, has been a cautionary lesson. Then, too, the progress of feminism has made the suicide of gifted women seem less a romantic triumph of the will than a sorry failure of the same. (The women's movement came too late for Sexton, who admired its goals but could not internalize its values, a combination of attitudes succinctly expressed in the nickname she gave herself: Ms. Dog.) The 16-year-old girl who slept with Sexton's poems under her pillow in 1972 is probably in law school today.

Finally, thanks largely to Sexton's own influence, it is no longer shocking for a woman to write poems about menstruation or her uterus or abortion—or, for that matter, about erotic joy, of which Sexton also had her share. No doubt many critics still wince in private at women poets who claim for themselves the sexual frankness long ago claimed by their brothers, but they are much less likely to wince in print, and when they do they look squeamish rather than authoritative. When Patti Smith can be compared to Rimbaud in *The New York Times Book Review*, anything goes.

As if to ratify that cultural shift, here is this eminently respectable-looking tome, a whopping 600-plus pages containing the eight books Sexton prepared for publication, the two posthumous collections edited by her daughter Linda Gray Sexton, six hitherto uncollected poems and a graceful, sympathetic and intelligent introduction by the poet Maxine Kumin, who was Sexton's close friend. If you are a fan or a library, you will doubtless want to rush out and get your copy. If you are a lover of poetry or a book reviewer, you may try



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to read your way straight through. I caution against this, though. There are beauties here—Sexton wrote as many tight, precise, brilliantly associative and emotionally subtle poems as any number of poets with more secure reputations. But she also wrote dozens and dozens and *dozens* of poems that are histrionic, verbose, flaccid, mechanical, sentimental, mannered and very, very boring. While this melancholy ratio is not surprising, or even, perhaps, very interesting—it's *hard* to write a good poem—the sheer quantity of inferior work does tend to dull one's response to the gems. One puts down this enormous book with the nagging feeling that all along a slim volume of verse was trapped inside it.

And yet, the gems are there. Sexton's poems about her hospitalizations, for instance, are sadder, humbler, less literary than Lowell's—closer, one feels, to the inmate's sense of infantilization in the face of psychiatric authority and the madness itself. There are no night watchmen reading "The Meaning of Meaning" in Sexton's dreary mental wards:

> Wait Mister. Which way is home?
> They turned the light out
> and the dark is moving in the corner.
> There are no sign posts in this room,
> four ladies, over eighty,
> in diapers every one of them.
> La la la, Oh music swims back to me
> and I can feel the tune they played
> the night they left me
> in this private institution on a hill.
> ("Music Swims Back to Me")

The sheer range of Sexton's voice is impressive. There is the restrained, formal grief of "The Double Image," with its delicate probings of mother-daughter connections; the dazzling purity of "The Starry Night"; the sardonic, precise diction of "Wanting to Die":

> Even then I have nothing against life.
> I know well the grass blades you mention,
> The furniture you have placed against the sun.
>
> But suicides have a special language.
> Like carpenters they want to know *which tools.*
> They never ask *why build.*

She could be witty, too, as in "Housewife":

> Some women marry houses.
> It's another kind of skin; it has a heart,
> a mouth, a liver and bowel movements.
> The walls are permanent and pink.

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See how she sits on her knees all
day,
faithfully washing herself down.
Men enter by force, drawn back like
Jonah
into their fleshy mothers.
A woman *is* her mother.
That's the main thing.

All the poems I've mentioned come from her first three books, *To Bedlam and Partway Back* (1960), *All My Pretty Ones* (1962) and *Live or Die* (1966), for which she won a Pulitzer Prize. Most of Sexton's memorable work is to be found in these early books: "The Moss of His Skin," "In the Deep Museum," "The Black Art," "Her Kind," "And One for My Dame," "The Wedding Night," "Little Girl, My String Bean, My Lovely Woman." The list goes on and on. And most of this good work pays homage, however faintly, to some sort of traditional form.

Like most poets of her era, Sexton began as an apprentice to poetic tradition. She was a daring rhymester ("The Double Image" gives us Gloucester/lost her and cancer/answer) and, on occasion, a brilliantly colloquial reworker of classical forms and themes—see her biting sonnet on the Icarus myth, "To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Triumph." Sexton moved away from form as she matured, as most poets do, but without having worked out ways of achieving in free verse what form makes so easy: the use of structure and sound to delimit a drama, intensify emotion and clarify meaning. With some notable exceptions—"Housewife" or "In Celebration of My Uterus," with its high-spirited echoes of "I Hear America Singing"—Sexton's free verse, early and late, is lax and rambling and self-indulgent. She starts a poem pages before announcing its subject, or she starts on one theme and wanders off into another. She uses language carelessly, relying on repetition, that bluntest of instruments, instead of on aural patterns—assonance, off-rhyme, half-rhyme, rhythms and pauses. Rather than use images that relate so as to deepen them all, she uses arbitrary, throwaway similes reminiscent of Roethke at his most annoying ("I . . . brought forth young girls/to grunt like fish"; "My long brown legs,/sweet dears as good as spoons").

Consider this passage, toward the end of "Pain for a Daughter," whose central event is the crushing of her daughter's foot by a beloved horse:

Blind with fear, she sits on the toilet,
her foot balanced over the washbasin,
her father, hydrogen peroxide in
hand,
performing the rites of the cleansing.
She bites on a towel, sucked in
breath,
sucked in and arched against the
pain,
her eyes glancing off me where
I stand at the door, eyes locked
on the ceiling, eyes of a stranger,
and then she cries . . .
Oh my God, help me!

This is purest bathos. Note the clumsy repetitions, the loose grammar, the language at once inflated and bland ("blind with fear," "performing the rites of the cleansing"), the ploddingly literal recounting of action, like instructions from a first-aid manual (First, sit on the toilet and balance the foot over the washbasin. Next, apply hydrogen peroxide). All this in a poem that has already taken time to inform us that Sexton's daughter "visits the neighbors' stable,/our acreage not zoned for barns"! It's as though Plath had begun "Cut," her poem about cutting her thumb while slicing an onion, with a description of a trip to the supermarket and ended it with a recipe for onion soup.

Speaking of Plath, what about "Sylvia's Death," surely one of the most florid acts of self-promotion ever written under cover of an elegy for a friend:

Thief—
how did you crawl into,
crawl down alone
into the death I wanted so badly and
for so long . . .

"Pain for a Daughter" and "Sylvia's Death" are not late poems, as it happens, and the faults they exemplify multiply wildly after *Live or Die*. Sexton was a prolific writer—Kumin is careful to point out that Sexton often revised painstakingly, but she also tells us that she frequently dashed off three or four poems in a single day—and much of her late work reads like first drafts, at once unfocused and glib.

Even here, though, there are moments. *Transformations*, Sexton's Freudian-suburban-chic modernizations of fairy tales, has humor and verve and images of exquisite strangeness and surreality ("Beauty is a simple passion,/but oh my friends in the end/you will dance the fire dance in iron shoes"). But you don't have to be a Christian to be revolted by "The Jesus Papers," an embarrassing farrago of smarmy religiosity and cheap sophistication: "It was the year/of the How To

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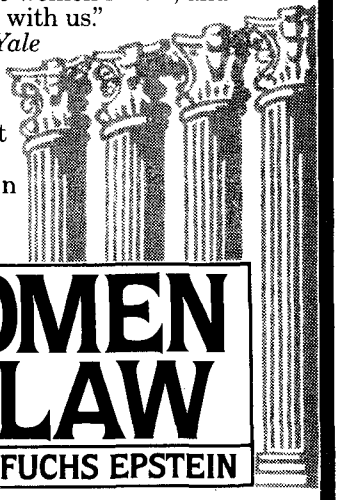

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Sex Book,/the Sensuous Man and Woman were frolicking/but Jesus was fasting./He ate his celibate life. . . ." Ick! Even worse are "The Divorce Papers," which put forward at great length the comparison, borrowed from Plath, of Sexton's husband to a Nazi and herself to a Jew.

The equation of marital failure with the genocide of millions is both monstrous and telling. In the late work, Sexton lavishes the same level of imprecise feverishness on anything and everything, from God to her therapist, from the signs of the zodiac to the Vietnam War dead. And one realizes with growing horror that these vastly disparate occasions really *are* all one for her, for they are all merely the flickering projections of a grotesque and seamless solipsism. In Sexton's case, at least, Sartre was wrong and Milton was right. Hell was not other people. It was herself.

Well, perhaps it is too much to ask that her work be larger-spirited and more stringent than it is. Poetry for Sexton was always a matter of half-art, half-therapy. "I hook into my mood and drain it onto the paper," she wrote of her prodigious output of letters, and she might have said the same thing about many of her poems. If one can see her as an artist who squandered her talent by refusing to discipline it—out of vanity or hunger for easy celebrity or sheer self-absorption—one can also see her as an anguished, mentally ill woman who managed out of her inner chaos to make a few poems that work as literature and as safety valves, a few momentary stays against confusion, not just for herself but for the reader as well.

Both of these assessments are right. Critics often find themselves quoting F. Scott Fitzgerald's famous remark that there are no second acts in American lives, and Sexton is squarely in the tradition of writers whose careers are a long downhill slide from early achievement. But Jarrell provides a kinder epitaph. "A good poet," he said, "is someone who manages, in a lifetime of standing out in thunderstorms, to be struck by lightning five or six times; a dozen or two dozen times and he is great." Never mind the numbers, or whether they were evenly spaced out over the course of her life. Anne Sexton did her standing out in thunderstorms. Her rain-soaked poems will vanish. The lightning-struck ones will remain. □

When I Hear the Word Gun I Reach for My Culture

ELIZABETH POCHODA

MRS. HARRIS: The Death of the Scarsdale Diet Doctor. *By Diana Trilling. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. 341 pp. $14.95.*

My hope is that years from now a literary descendant of Diana Trilling's, by which I mean a serious critic with an eye on the cultural long haul, will tell us about the deserving books we neglected this year while everyone was reading and writing about Diana Trilling. For the moment, however, it may be worth noting that much of *Mrs. Harris*'s fascination derives less from its subject than from its delicious mixture of Mrs. Trilling's mellow wisdom with the coarser stuff of murder and notoriety. Certainly for me, the question of how Trilling would overcome her inhibitions against gossip and get the story held more interest than the murder of Herman Tarnower did. And, as it happens, *Mrs. Harris* serves up another intriguing mixture—the author's unexpected talent for journalism and what might be called her cultural pathology.

But I should say at once that *Mrs. Harris* is often enjoyable reading, and never more so than when Mrs. Trilling leaves off interpretation and dishes the courtroom dirt. I do not mean by this that she is a gossip, just that she is a good reporter—vivid and witty, with a gift for extracting narrative flow from the pokiest trial in recent history. And I do believe that this is a gift, for, as we shall see, anyone can hawk cultural interpretations.

For Trilling, the trial itself was something of a conversion experience: her initial sympathy with Jean Harris was not enhanced by her courtroom observations. Fine. When she is discussing the question of Harris's possible guilt, she is entirely convincing, and, as I've said, she is a good observer. But that talent leads her astray; no sooner is a detail registered than Trilling pounces and paws over it like an English teacher interpreting a symbol in a novel or a poem. One example: she admires the sedate clothes of George Bolen, the prosecutor, and compares them favorably with those of Joel Aurnou, the defense lawyer, who, she says, wears "his inevitable brown suit that looks as if it'd been sprinkled with those shiny little grains that the TV commercials tell us give decaffeinated coffee its flavor. (Or am I mixing up two brown suits, one decaffeinated and one real, with milk in it?)"

If you think this very witty, though uncharitable, observation is an aside having nothing to do with Mrs. Trilling's conversion to the camp of the Harris doubters, read on. In the next sentence she declares that by contrast with Aurnou, "morality is in every line of Bolen's appearance." Men in iridescent suits do not, it seems, inspire moral confidence. This parlaying of observations about personal style into higher moral generalities occurs throughout the book and transforms what would otherwise have been an engaging report on criminal justice into a cultural document in its own right. Of course, the morality angle is precisely the ploy that enables Mrs. Trilling to bypass the censors of the high culture and report respectably on "real life."

When Trilling first heard that the middle-aged headmistress of a well-regarded prep school, a magna cum laude graduate of Smith College, had run amok in the bedroom of her lover and accidentally or premeditatively shot the wealthy diet doctor, she instinctively sympathized with the alleged perpetrator. Like many others, she read the case as another chapter in feminist melodrama: tired of playing musical chairs with his two girlfriends, Herman Tarnower had decided to cut one of them loose—the middle-aged one. But the trial was another matter. Mrs. Trilling tells us that it woke her from the deep sleep of feminist orthodoxy, which had obscured a simple truth: Jean Harris apparently hated the good doctor. Surely Mrs. Trilling is right about the hatred, although I don't see why that emotion should be evidence of guilt or cause for withdrawing sympathy. But there was something else working to turn Trilling's sympathies. The more she listened to stories of Hi and Jean and the more she learned about Tarnower's life style, the more she realized that this was not the tragedy of a soul mate's fall from high place but a drama of cultural miscegenation. The gifted,

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intellectual Jean Harris had given herself to a vulgarian, a newly rich, culturally pretentious doctor whose bookcases revealed not Herodotus but *The Joys of Yiddish*. Even worse, Mrs. Harris probably did not care about her lover's lack of culture or his pretentions. This makes her, in Trilling's eyes, a co-conspirator with Tarnower against what Trilling calls "proper moral style."

The Jean Harris story here comes in an envelope of sorts, and this envelope is a lengthy sermon on vulgarity and morality which begins in a surprisingly dishonest way. Following an incisive account of the deceptions of Aurnou, Harris's lawyer, Trilling notes with astonishment that he leaked pro-Harris stories to the press and then, at the pretrial hearing, demanded that the press be excluded from the courtroom. All the press coverage, he explained, made it impossible for Harris to get a fair trial. Disingenuous, Trilling rightly calls this, and in the very next sentence (new paragraph, no transition) she launches *her* sermon:

> Recently a leading American novelist whose books sell in vast quantity but who has nonetheless retained his prestige in the community of advanced intellectuals—this is unusual although it happens more frequently today than it did in earlier decades of the century—was interviewed in his new home in the country, bought from his sizable literary earnings. Talking of a critic who had been hard on his work, also of a novelist with whom he competed for fame, he asked if the former had a house like his and whether the latter could serve as good a lunch. The exchange was published to no comment from anyone I know who read it.

Talk about disingenuous. Perhaps Mrs. Trilling needn't have mentioned that the novelist is Philip Roth, the deploring of whose work she has made a small cottage industry, and who has, in turn, written amusingly of her critical deficiencies. But *surely* she ought to have acknowledged that Roth's remarks were delivered as comic relief in the course of an otherwise clutzy author profile, and that they were so effective a sendup of vulgarity that even readers of *The New York Times Book Review* laughed. Disingenuous indeed. But let us examine the slender notion of vulgarity on which so much of the book hangs. The passage about Roth continues:

> If the charge of vulgarity is not to be brought against someone who lives by sensibility and who, as an artist, is among the legislators of mankind, is it fair to bring it against a doctor in Westchester the whole of whose claim to cultural distinction is that he wrote a diet book? The criterion of bad taste is, I know, no longer permitted the socially conscientious. Anyone who makes the judgment is accused of asserting a right of birth or class and, in consequence, is thought to be indulging in snobbery. But surely the way in which taste is exercised—every kind of taste: in art and architecture and decoration, dress, food, manners, speech—is the firmest clue we have to *how someone pursues his life in*

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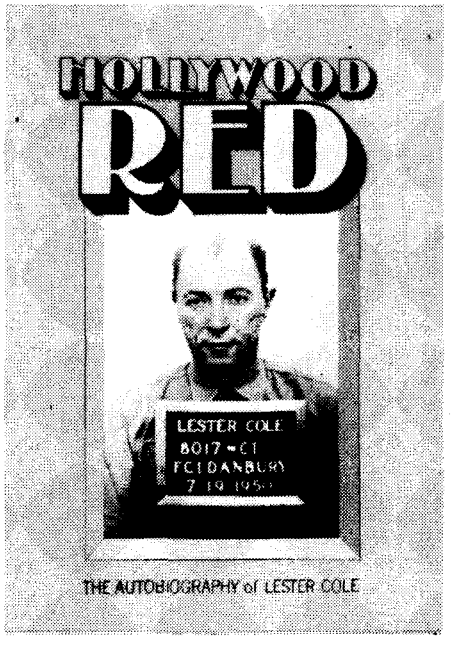

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culture and therefore to the style of moral being he would legislate for us if he had the power.

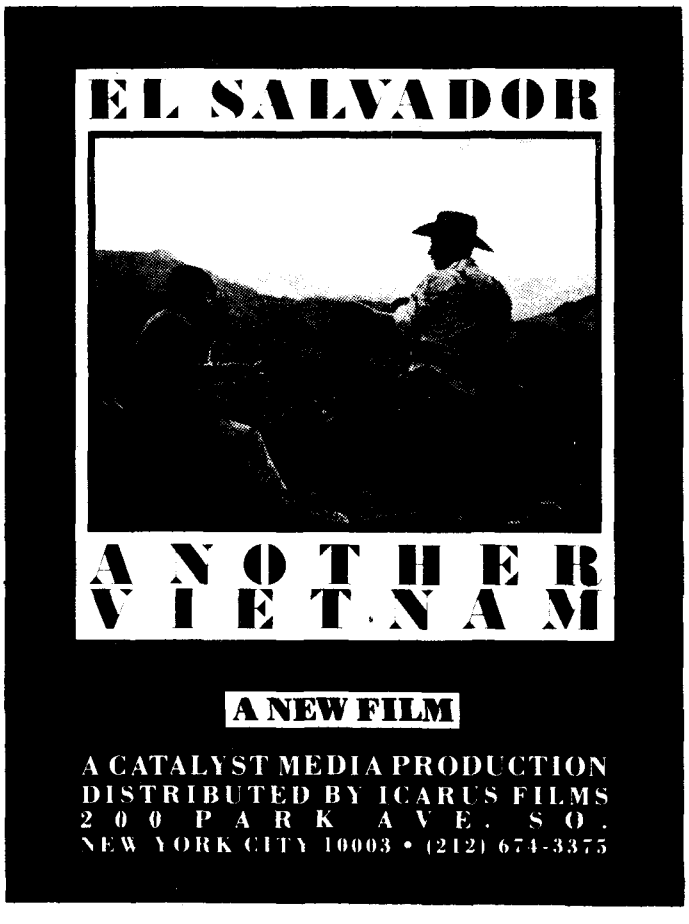
With the exemplum of Roth and his "vulgarity" in hand, the author resumes her sermon. Describing Tarnower's diet book, his house, his trophies, his friends and his book again, Trilling yo-yos between the assumption that we can agree on what bad taste is and the equally funny notion that it has moral implications—that bad taste is bad moral choice. Tarnower is guilty—his private pond with its private Buddha indicts him; Jean Harris, who should have known better, is guilty by association; we are all guilty (it begins to sound like a Rose Franzblau column) for slacking off in our use of the word vulgar. I think Mrs. Trilling suspects this slackness is the work of sentimental egalitarians, but the point is that there is no further explanation of how esthetics and morality can be equated; what you have just read is it.

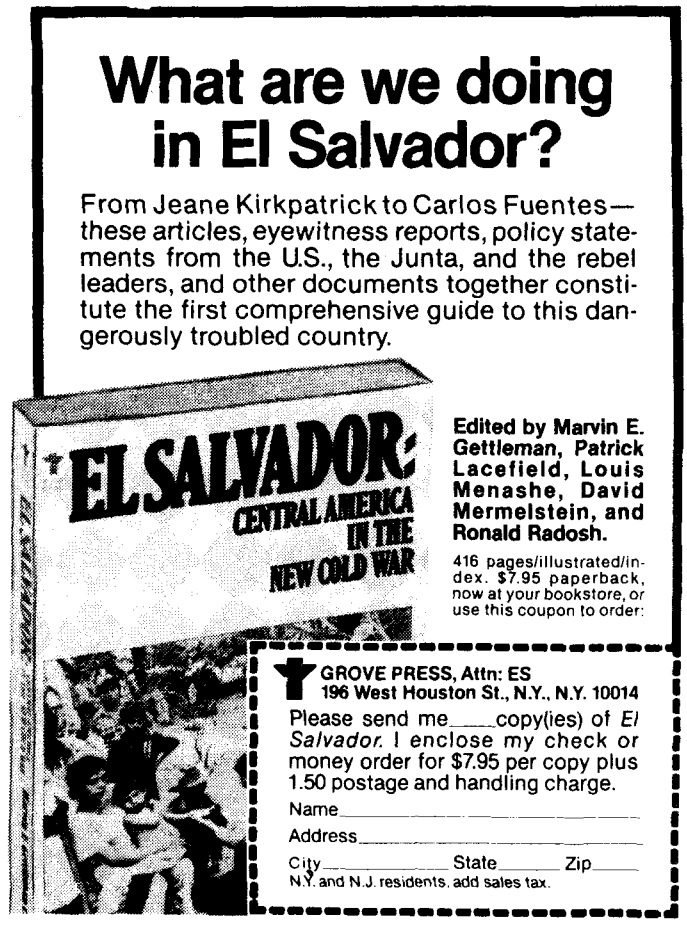
Perhaps it is unfair to single out Mrs. Trilling here, since the idea that good taste is somehow morally indicative or redemptive is widely held, and never, so far as I can tell, with anything more to justify it than simple fiat. We are assumed to agree that the beauties of "The Eve of St. Agnes" make it somehow morally superior to *The Scarsdale Diet Book*, just as Dove Cottage is somehow morally superior to San Simeon. (I was pleased to see that Diana Trilling's publishers do not share this prejudice; they are displaying in their windows her complete works alongside Herman Tarnower's far more lucrative volume.)

If Trilling does not tell us why or how style is related to morality, she does suggest how prejudice that it is is sustained, at least in her case. Apparently, it comes from reading books, but not always reading them too well. In the course of one of her sermonettes on the relationship between esthetic and moral judgment, Trilling cries out for the courage of F. Scott Fitzgerald, who so boldly condemned Jay Gatsby's life as "the service of a vast, vulgar and meretricious beauty." With that phrase, Fitzgerald, she thinks, pulled the plug on American "materialism." But the vulgar and meretricious beauty Fitzgerald spoke of was not the vulgarity of Gatsby's expensive toys—his shirts and cars and parties, which were wonderfully innocent and splendid as material things must be. It was Gatsby's enchantment with and service to Tom and Daisy Buchanan, who exercised their privileges at the cost of others' lives. *That* was immoral and vulgar, but it was a vice not indicated by the Buchanans' clothes or cars or furnishings, which were, as it happens, much more "tasteful" than Gatsby's splendors.

And certainly the prejudice also derives comfort from a highly selective reading from the works of Matthew Arnold, especially from those passages where he excoriates the Philistines:

> Culture says: 'Consider these people then, their way of life, their habits, their manners, the very tones of their voice; look at them attentively; observe the literature they read, the things which give them pleasure, the words which come forth out of their mouths, the thoughts which make the furniture of their minds; would any amount of wealth be worth having with the condition that one was to become just like these people by having it?'
>
> (*Culture and Anarchy*)

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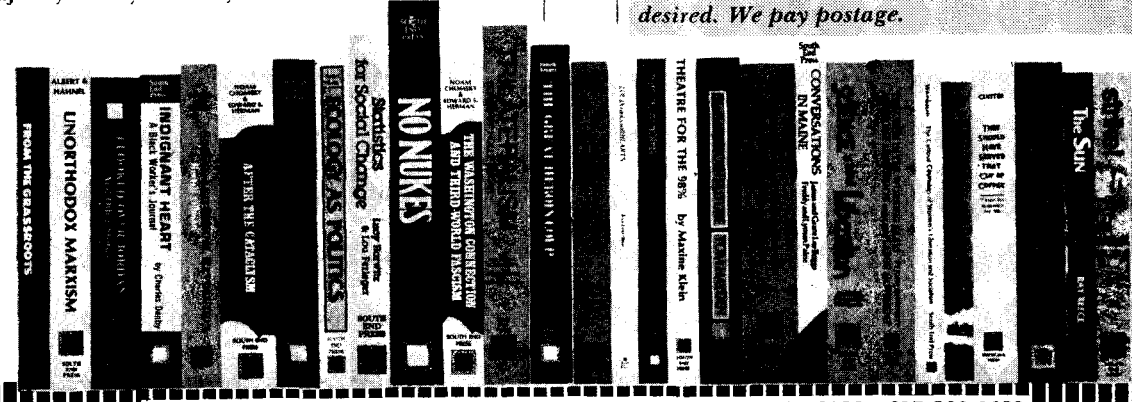

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This is precisely the sort of headmistressy priggishness Jean Harris ought to have exhibited if she wanted to be Trilling's soul mate rather than Tarnower's mistress.

But what of the Harris case in all of this? Herman Tarnower *was* morally repellent, a "small time emotional imperialist, a respectable middle-class bully boy of sex," as Diana Trilling so wonderfully describes him, but one can equally well imagine his particular brand of cruelty being practiced by any number of others—even, say, by college professors whose style of life would make a nineteenth-century gentleman stand in awe. As to the doctor's condescension toward his mistress, which Mrs. Trilling sees predicted in the style of his house and the directives of his diet book, I would like the names of a dozen M.D.s of whatever cultural level or taste who do not condescend to their patients.

What is really at issue with Trilling is Tarnower's Jewishness. As she describes his odyssey from his origins among Eastern European Jewish immigrants to the world of Westchester's wealthy German Jews, one senses her disapproval of his having become the wrong sort of Jew with the right sort of money, doctor's money. The Trillings, both Diana and her late husband, Lionel, have set rigorously Jamesian standards for Jewishness in our time. And so it is a deep affront to Diana Trilling when a Philip Roth or a Herman Tarnower or a Joel Aurnou fails so publicly to be a Matthew Arnold.

Although most of us enjoy using it when it suits us, the equation of style and morality leads into a cultural cul-de-sac where the effort to make *them* like *us* is justified by the rationale that it will make them better. Small wonder, then, that the hostility to culture which was practically nonexistent before Arnold's day is now epidemic. Ironically, Jean Harris's defense relied heavily on establishing her as a lady of intellectual style, as if to say that such a style conferred a moral stature that was inimical to murder. Trilling is quick to point out the shoddiness of this defense, and yet she has purveyed a version of it herself by suggesting that Harris wasn't classy enough—that she betrayed her cultural class by accepting Tarnower's "false values" and that this mistake as much as anything else was responsible for her ruin. □

Uneasy Dissonance

ELIZABETH FOX-GENOVESE

THE FASHIONABLE MIND: Reflections on Fashion 1970-1981. *By Kennedy Fraser. Alfred A. Knopf. 270 pp. $14.50.*

THE LANGUAGE OF CLOTHES. *By Alison Lurie. Random House. 261 pp. $20.*

The language of fashion, comprising increasingly dissonant voices, appears now more than ever to be the language of our discontent. Competing silhouettes, pants and skirts of all conceivable lengths, near nudity and preppie conventionality jostle one another. The gap between clothes for work and clothes for play steadily widens. Designer jeans, whatever else they may do, pander to our sadomasochistic fantasies. Fashion photography, which specializes in magnifying our sexual malaise, flirts openly with pornography, including child pornography and autoeroticism.

Some advertising efforts, eager to restore to fashion a semblance of normality, occasionally yield modern versions of domestic portraits: elegant woman at home with children, elegant woman cutting flowers in the garden, elegant woman admiring her table before the arrival of guests. But as visions of a stable social order, these exercises lack conviction. Clothes, which only recently seemed at last to be conforming to the needs of ordinary—or at least middle-class—women's lives, have suddenly taken on the appearance of bizarre and threatening fantasies. Even the floating evocations of romantic femininity usually project somewhere within them an uneasy dissonance—as if the undergarments were dirty or missing, or the bodice ripped.

As a system of visual representation, fashion invites esthetic judgment. As the expression of individual moods and social trends, it invites cultural interpretation. As a collection of commodities, the sale of which depends upon their claims to imperious novelty, it invites sophisticated hawking. Despite the best efforts of its most loyal aficionados, fashion resists nonreferential, art-for-art's-sake treatment. Despite the best efforts of its most materialist critics, fashion resists reductionist treatments. Since fashion articulates the entire range of social interaction, it may perhaps be best understood as a system of conventions. Fashion as art, fashion as personal expression and fashion as business coalesce in fashion as the representation of class, gender and generation. The apparent variety that prevails today may be less the sign of a new democracy than the symptom of the travails of a new hierarchy.

The Fashionable Mind contains selections from Kennedy Fraser's fashion reporting for *The New Yorker* since 1970. Fashion reporting for *The New Yorker* resembles movie reviewing for *The New Yorker*: it falls somewhere between the brief informational accounts of the daily press and Criticism. And if Pauline Kael, why not Kennedy Fraser? Particularly since Fraser is such a delightful mistress of *The New Yorker* idiom. The trick of this genre is to combine intelligence, a keen eye for the telling detail and a certain breezy modishness—that *je ne sais quoi* of unpretentious sophistication. Like an amusing and ironically self-reflective little dress, *The New Yorker* writer manifests charm, style and an unthreatening hint of originality within the well-established

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese is at work on a book about fashion.

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dictates of commercial viability. *The New Yorker* writer, like the sophisticated little dress, has a limited and demanding audience that insists upon familiarity of tone and exclusivity of taste. But being schooled in the nuances of status, the audience welcomes the slightly esoteric reference that flatters its sense of itself as a bona fide elite. It can be titillated by a smart rap on the knuckles of its self-complacency. It can be jarred into reflecting, over a glass of very dry white wine, on the futility of its ways and the meaning of its customs.

The pieces chosen for this volume range from "Hail, Covered Knee!" which welcomed the return of the calf-length skirt in 1970, to "Fashion on the Move," which comments on the current divorce of fashion as a visual system from ponderous and troublesome questions of meaning. The pieces between touch on "Hot Pants," "Hats," "Fitness," "Balenciaga," "Couture," "The Executive Woman," "Electronic Shopping" and more. The title essay, "The Fashionable Mind," anchors the volume and best exemplifies Fraser's abilities as a critic. The occasional pieces vary almost as widely in quality as they do in topic. On her off days, Fraser can push participant observation to the very limit of identification by taking the claims of the fashion industry and the fashionable at face value. We can, without warning, find ourselves drawn into a straight-faced account of the significance of Stephen Burroughs. But the passing lapses from critical distance do not irremediably mar the interest of the collection.

Fraser does not attempt to present a sustained interpretation of fashion or a history of clothes. She offers her immediate responses to the fashion of the decade without revision or homogenization and leaves the history and the interpretation to others, although she is clearly equal to the task. In the end, the principal value of *The Fashionable Mind* consists less in its being a chronicle of fashion than in its being a record of our changing response to it. Like children looking at our own baby pictures, we are all accustomed to the delights of a retrospective glance: "Did we really look like that?" Fraser's essays permit us the rather more interesting self-recovery: "Did we really think about fashion like that?"

The powers-that-be of fashion enforce draconian discipline among those who would write about it; they control access to fashion shows and fashionable gatherings, and they exclude overzealous critics with the same cold finality as leading hostesses drop the unsuitable from their guest lists. Fraser has had to work within these constraints, and her success at her craft testifies to her observance of the rules. Her infrequent slips from official piety belong in the category, and exhibit the charm, of a frolicsome adolescent who knows just how far she can bend the rules of her elders.

"The Fashionable Mind" is Fraser's one foray into the social significance of fashion. And even here, she advances her criticism without directly irritating the geese of the golden eggs. In this essay, she identifies fashion as neither the specific garments nor the people who produce and peddle them: "Fashion usually is neither named nor noted but is simply the lens through which our society perceives itself and the mold to which it increasingly shapes itself." And she resists all attempts to

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romanticize either society or its lens. Styles that appear to exhibit restlessness and rebellion are only styles; fashion supports "established centers of power." Having witnessed the way fashion has corrupted our view of the world, Fraser acknowledges that "we must now sit by as fashion subverts our definition of the self." We too willingly treat our thoughts and values as commodities, presumably changing them with the shifting winds: "When the mind surrenders itself to fashion, the first casualty is objective judgment—which is, to all intents, the mind itself." In short, fashion thinly veils the hard realities of money and power. If we allow ourselves to be seduced by its appearances, we shall have to pay with bedazzled impotence.

This wisdom does not inhibit Fraser from returning to filiopietistic considerations about where fashion is going. We have, she feels, exhausted this century's quota of inventiveness and imagination and can look forward only to such reworkings and uncertain replays as "retro dressing." She even retreats from the implications of her insights about money and power and suggests that through fashion we may be locating a higher "meaning" by discovering new forms of personal expression in stylistic anarchy. Fashion as a system of coherent visual significance is dead. Fashion as personal meaning has replaced it. But one still wonders about the social consequences of different personal meanings.

Fraser vacillates. She must continue to earn her living. The power of the fashion establishment is probably greater than it has been in a long time, and the current fashion scene is undeniably confusing. Yves Saint Laurent, in the guise of a return to classic elegance, has recently shown one safari jacket with three possible bottoms: long pants, calf-length pants and a knee-baring skirt. At least Fraser does not tell us that this constitutes a higher stylistic truth that will, in the bargain, allow us to express the multiplicity of our true selves.

The social and political realities that have advanced the mavens of fashion to center stage may not be unrelated to the confusing messages of fashion itself. Fashion, as the language of our interaction, faithfully reflects social tensions and self-deceptions. Britain got its royal wedding last summer while rioting wracked its major cities. Lady Diana's dress, which married an ostentatious display of crude wealth to a wondrous combination of virginal modesty and provocative sexuality—the arrogance of modern royalty and the vestiges of 1960s street culture—expressed the internal contradictions of the determined, but confused, ruling class.

At home, Nancy Reagan and her ladies-in-waiting have joyfully seized their chance. Not for them the confusion and self-doubt of the young. The $25,000 inauguration wardrobe probably served less to inspire the American public than to assure the country-club set that their day had come. Among the new elite, fashion designers such as Oscar de la Renta and Bill Blass enjoy a privileged position; they are not merely arbiters of taste but also full-fledged industrial tycoons. Fashion as business has made it. But what of fashion as message—as self-representation and public image?

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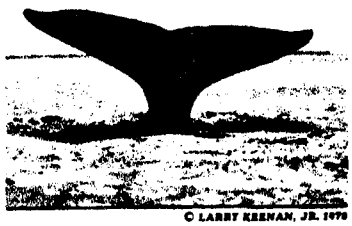

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culture. Many interpreted this as a conflict between generations, especially between established society and the voice of the youth culture. The changing roles and aspirations of women added to the uncertainty. From the miniskirts of the mid-1960s at least until the "peasant look" of 1976, clothing seemed to be breaking free of the last vestiges of high fashion and bourgeois convention. Gloves, hats, spike heels, girdles and other manifestations of fashion as the custodian of class differences, etiquette and female propriety were swept away by the tide of social ferment. We cherished the illusion that the changes of the 1960s had broken through the generational and class domination of fashion. Designers could not do as they chose. Women would not obey.

Today, most women have indeed been liberated from fashion. They do not earn enough to afford the choices. And yet fashion remains very much with us. The model wars spill across the pages of the national press. Brooke Shields graces the cover of *Time* and engages the reflections of Nicholas von Hoffman. A recent edition of *The New York Times Magazine* presented New York's fashions for spring. The clothes represented that amalgam of styles to which we are becoming accustomed, with a slight emphasis on white and romanticism (echoes of the royal wedding?), but there was much indecision about shapes and length of hems. The real message lay not in the pictures but in the text—or rather in an omission from the text: there were no prices.

The current fashion wars have become intraclass wars. The struggle is taking place within the class of the newly rich, who are determined to implement compassionless class rule but are unsure which of the competing conservative banners will best help them do so. Fashion is a language that conveys meanings. A visual system with an internal logic and dynamic of its own, it is never innocent of the social relations it expresses, transforms and idealizes. The contradictions are too numerous to list. But for a single example that will do as well as any, try the issue of *Vogue* that displays a precociously sexy, overdressed and overpainted Brooke Shields, lounging in an evening dress that might well belong to Nancy Reagan. That, friends, is class. The pictures vividly reveal the contradiction of the New Right's attempt to reimpose older values: Shields, exuding corruption and sexually exploited youth, is presumably supposed to sell clothes to prissy upper-middle-class women who publicly propound the virtues of family, oppose abortion and bemoan the increase in teen-age pregnancy.

Alison Lurie's new book, *The Language of Clothes*, which belongs to the venerable tradition of the history and interpretation of fashion so well exemplified in the works of James Laver, Quentin Bell and Geoffrey Squire, touches glancingly on these problems of fashion as symptom. But Lurie prefers an individual meaning to a social one.

Ever since Roland Barthes turned his special talents to fashion, there has been an open invitation to develop a broadly accessible semiotic interpretation of fashion—something in the manner of Susan Sontag. Lurie would have seemed to be the ideal person for the task. An accomplished and witty novelist and a respected academic, her wide range includes a justly famous course in children's literature. Her sharp style and keen sense of social foibles should have produced an amusing and disabused chronicle of our collective vanities and sartorial obsessions. They did not. *The Language of Clothes* betrays none of her merciless eye for the deadly detail that strips poor mortals of their shreds of self-image. Lurie reassures us that the emperor is indeed wearing clothes. But why she should bother remains something of a puzzle.

Lurie starts off in a promising enough direction. Clothing does constitute a language, or rather—and this may have been her first error—it constitutes the parts of speech. Fashion is the language. We need not delve into the complexities of linguistic and semiotic analyses, for she does not. The language of clothes turns out to be a very homey and familiar tongue indeed—"I'm okay, you're okay"—a modern self-help manual of sorts. Drawing more on common sense and occasional bits of literature than on fashion history, Lurie makes her way through time, place, status, opinion, youth and age, color and pattern, male and female, and sex and fashion. This topical organization lends itself to an undemanding blend of history, cultural patterns and modern folk wisdom. Her tone, at its best, is refreshingly common-sensical. She does not succumb to the pure estheticism that would

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see fashion as transcending any social or psychological referents. She understands that it is inextricably bound to the real world and to real people.

But more than complacent reflections on the intricacies or representations of fashion is required of a book about fashion as a social code. Lurie's commitment to the women's movement and, even more, her sensitivity to the self-doubts and the dreams of other women illuminate many parts of her text. But she chose to affiliate her work with semiotics and thus cannot dodge the charge that she does not adequately recognize the complexity of fashion as a language, much less its intrinsic stylistic properties and its evolution.

Lurie leans toward the materialist attitude of Thorstein Veblen, as reworked by Quentin Bell. She acknowledges the brilliance of Anne Hollander's *Seeing Through Clothes*, but seems not to understand that Hollander's premises were radically different from her own. In the end, Lurie is most comfortable with word-by-word translation. Black can mean gloom, guilt and sophistication. Gray can mean modesty and mystery. It is only acceptable to wear clothing bearing the emblem of a school other than your own if you are a small child or if you are sleeping with the owner of the item. Lurie allows for changes in meanings over time and according to social group, but she clings to the notion that we can establish equivalencies. On any given point, she can be imaginative, sophisticated or just plain smart. But her strategy sacrifices any broader idea of fashion as a system.

Lurie's sensible empiricism belongs to the best Anglo-Saxon tradition. No reader will challenge her interpretations as too esoteric, complex or farfetched. Most of them sound plausible enough, if a touch literal-minded. But she reveals herself to be committed to the fundamental pretensions of fashion and the modern fashion industry—indeed, perhaps more effectively so than its most flamboyant celebrants. For Lurie defends fashion, with all its failings and foibles, as the custodian of truth, justice and the American way of life. There are those, she muses, who harbor the illusion that a single uniform such as a jumpsuit, worn by all, would be a convenience and a relief: "Convenient perhaps, but not exactly a relief. Such a utopia would give most of us the same chill we feel when a stadium full of Communist-bloc athletes in identical sports outfits, shouting slogans in unison, appears on TV." Lurie does not explain how uniformed Communist-bloc athletes differ from such uniformed capitalist-bloc athletes as the New York Yankees or the Los Angeles Dodgers or the Dallas Cowgirls, all of whom we know to be as American as apple pie. But the threat of this gray utopia more than justifies what we endure, in the name of free enterprise, from the fashion industry and our own addiction to commodities. "Fashion is free speech," Lurie writes, "and one of the privileges, if not always one of the pleasures of a free world." Nancy Reagan could not have said it better. □

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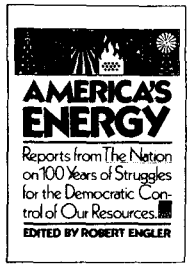
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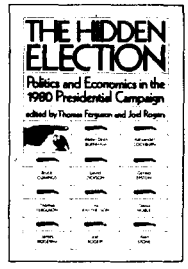

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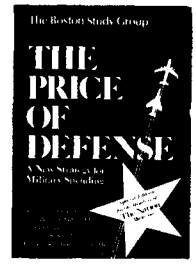

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Time of Trouble

JAMES SLOAN ALLEN

THE ADOLESCENT IDEA: Myths of Youth and the Adult Imagination. *By Patricia Meyer Spacks. Basic Books. 308 pp. $17.*

THE ADOLESCENT: A Psychological Self-Portrait. *By Daniel Offer, Eric Ostrov and Kenneth I. Howard. Basic Books. 195 pp. $14.95.*

THE PRIVATE LIFE OF THE AMERICAN TEENAGER. *By Jane Norman and Myron Harris, Ph.D. Rawson, Wade Publishers. 311 pp. $14.95.*

VIVIENNE: The Life and Suicide of an Adolescent Girl. *By John E. Mack and Holly Hickler. Little, Brown and Company. 237 pp. $13.95.*

FAST TIMES AT RIDGEMONT HIGH. *By Cameron Crowe. Simon and Schuster. 253 pp. $5.95.*

YOUR ADOLESCENT: An Owner's Manual. *By Carol Eisen Rinzler. Atheneum Publishers. 107 pp. $8.95.*

TEENAGE ROMANCE, or How to Die of Embarrassment. *By Delia Ephron. Drawings by Edward Koren. The Viking Press. 144 pp. $9.95.*

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times," said Dickens of the years before the French Revolution. Most of us say it of our adolescence. Like that historic period of false security and agitated expectations, adolescence is an unsettled age of illusion and uncertainty, desire and despair. Many people never recover from it; no one survives unmarked. For the tissues of identity, slowly forming in those long years, are so much putty in the hands of parents and especially peers, who so casually hail and hurt, beckon and deny.

Yet adolescence was not always so. The young have probably exhibited the restless energy of puberty ever since human beings organized themselves in communities. But only in the last 100 years or so have young people in the West regularly displayed the pattern of behavior that adults have come to equate with adolescence: bizarre mood swings, acute self-consciousness, fierce peer-group identification, defiance of authority, and so forth. So disturbing was this pattern to psychologists near the turn of the century that, led by the American G. Stanley Hall, they dubbed it a pathological syndrome. (Hall also thought it a distinctly modern and American phenomenon.)

Psychologists no longer consider such adolescent behavior pathological. They now say it reflects the normal difficulties of entering adulthood—hence the youthful "identity crisis" given currency by Erik Erikson. But even as a mere crisis, adolescence remains a time of storm and stress.

This reigning image of adolescence is the subject of a shelf of books this fall, some caricaturing the image, others labeling it a myth. All of them ask: Do adults truly know what adolescence is, or do they just think they know?

On the evidence of English and American literature of the last 250 years, Patricia Meyer Spacks asserts that the "adult imagination" has created a "mythology of adolescence" that may not reflect the facts of adolescence but has certainly governed adult perceptions of it. Although she fudges the line between ideas and facts, and grounds her conclusions on only a

James Sloan Allen is a critic and a cultural historian.

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handful of books, Spacks argues quite plausibly in *The Adolescent Idea* that representations of adolescence in both fiction and nonfiction have persistently displayed an ambivalence rooted in an admiration toward the capacities of youth and an uncertainty over the fruits of those capacities. But this ambivalence has undergone a marked shift over time. No longer does it express itself, as it did in the eighteenth century, in adult authoritarianism and measured confidence in the young; now adults are all apologies and pessimism. Thus, if the myth of adolescence "tells us of ourselves, our ancestors, and our descendants," as Spacks concludes, it says that adults now see adolescence as a time of amorphous power and impotent rage and that they fear the power and feel guilty for causing the rage.

Spacks implies that this sad ending is the consequence of adults having victimized themselves through their myth of adolescence. She may be right. But adults deserve their fate for reasons of fact as well as myth. Adolescence as we know it is a tragedy of lost energies, needless pains and miseducation. And adults have made it so by prolonging childlike economic dependence often well into the third decade of life, by debasing the dignity and authority of adulthood and by granting the greatest influence over adolescent life to those least able to serve it: other adolescents, especially as they are found in our most damaging institution besides jail—the high school. There, bursting with new physical capabilities and needs, resenting their powerlessness and feeding on unchastened yearnings, adolescents learn to deride authority, to prize superficial appearances and to thrive on fleeting social esteem and the fantasies of popular culture.

An affectionate account of one group of adolescents by David Owen, a young journalist who disguised himself as a teen-ager and went back to high school for a year only confirms this judgment. The third book of its kind in the last year or so, *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, by Cameron Crowe, claims that this particular visitor grasped the truth of adolescence by experiencing it from the inside—where, he confesses, he became so at home that he lost touch with adulthood for a time. "I did not want to become yet another adult writing about adolescence and *the kids* from an adult perspective," he says loftily. "This story I felt belonged to the kids themselves." And what is their story? One of sex, gossip, cars, gripes, posturings, self-consciousness, ecstasies and miseries. The author smiles approvingly at his new friends' adventures and concludes that grownups don't really know the young because "the only time these students acted like kids was when they were around adults." Well, yes, "kids" don't seem like kids except in relation to adults. But the reader seeking clues to adolescence does not smile; the spectacle of ephemeral exaltation, chronic anxiety and human waste is too great.

Smiles, not depression, must greet the jolly caricatures of adolescence by Delia Ephron (*Teenage Romance, or How to Die of Embarrassment*) and Carol Eisen Rinzler (*Your Adolescent: An Owner's Manual*). But these books tell the same story as *Fast Times*. To Ephron, adolescence is all self-consciousness and histrionics—the anguish of being perceived by peers or by anyone else as something less than one wishes to be; the acting out of this fantasized self before the ever-present audience. To Rinzler, the keener observer, adolescence is this and more. The young are willful, irrational, solipsistic and capa-

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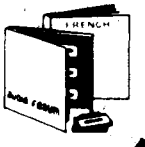

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ble of seeing "life ruined forever by wearing the wrong belt" and of reducing all emotional states to "(1) bored and (2) okay."

If these caricatures magnify reality by exaggerations more amusing than sad, the life and death of Vivienne Loomis as recorded separately in *Vivienne* by John E. Mack, a psychologist, and Holly Hickler, one of the girl's teachers, also magnify adolescence by exaggeration, but there is nothing amusing about it. A gifted poet and an extraordinarily sensitive girl, Vivienne fashioned expectations for herself and her world that reached such moral and emotional heights that no experience could sustain them. Then, convinced of her inferiority, disillusioned by unfulfilling sexual experiences, longing for a beloved and caring teacher who had moved away and misjudged by her loving but preoccupied parents, she killed herself before her fifteenth birthday.

Vivienne was not, the authors concede, a typical adolescent. Still, Mack believes her typical of those young people who commit suicide—the second leading cause of adolescent deaths. And she exemplifies at their extremes the vulnerability and the tragedy of adolescence. For Vivienne, as her own words disclose, succumbed to the gravest malady of the adolescent character in our time: the confusion of fantasy and reality. Because adolescents lack the social and economic obligations and rewards that lend structure to the ego and create a firm identity, they must define themselves primarily through fantasy, or mental images. Unchallenged by worldly experience, these mental images acquire the emotional sway of uncompromising truths. And when experience later collides with them, either they must be abandoned or the adolescent is engulfed by a sense of failure and self-contempt. Vivienne turned that self-contempt into self-destruction.

But wait, you say. One adolescent's suicide, or even the 2,000 that occur each year, does not make adolescence itself a tragedy of pain and loss, for most young people do not kill themselves. Shouldn't these survivors be the measure of adolescence? Our journalist in love with high school thinks so, and so do the authors of two research projects: *The Private Life of the American Teenager*, by Jane Norman and Myron Harris, and *The Adolescent*, by psychologists Daniel Offer, Eric Ostrov and Kenneth I. Howard. Picking up where Spacks leaves off, they say that the adult "myths" of adolescent storm and stress, unruliness and unreason, badly misrepresent the truth. Ask adolescents how they see themselves, these books claim, and they will say they are happy, optimistic, compliant and calm.

This cheery conclusion rests, for Norman and Harris, on some 160,000 responses to an informal survey that appeared in student publications across the country, and for Offer, et al., on about 15,000 responses to a carefully prepared questionnaire distributed periodically between 1962 and 1980 in selected school districts. Although the two studies yielded similar results, only Offer's derived from a systematic rationale and explicitly aimed to reverse the tradition of psychological opinion that labeled adolescence a time of trouble.

To discover the truth about adolescence from the inside, Offer and his colleagues asked teen-agers several hundred questions on such subjects as emotional control, social confidence, feelings about the body, sex, the family, etc., all of which were meant to measure "self-esteem." The responses surprised even Offer: Overwhelmingly, adolescents reported that they saw themselves as generally self-controlled, respectful of their parents, dedicated to work, untroubled by sex, and so on. "The modal American teenager," Offer concluded, is "confident, happy, and self-satisfied" (although a trace of anxiety is quite common and a slight weakening of self-esteem appears in a few categories from the early 1960s to the late 1970s).

This is not the adolescence usually written about, nor is it the one most of us encounter in our children. But that is exactly Offer's point: "Adults have created a 'generation gap' by systematically distorting the adolescent experience." Yet this charge rests entirely on the doubtful assumptions that adolescents know themselves well enough "to provide valid self-description" and that the researchers can properly interpret those self-descriptions.

Even if adolescents know what they think and feel, can they judge the maturity of those thoughts and feelings? How many tantrums does a 15-year-old allow himself before he gives himself low marks on Offer's topic

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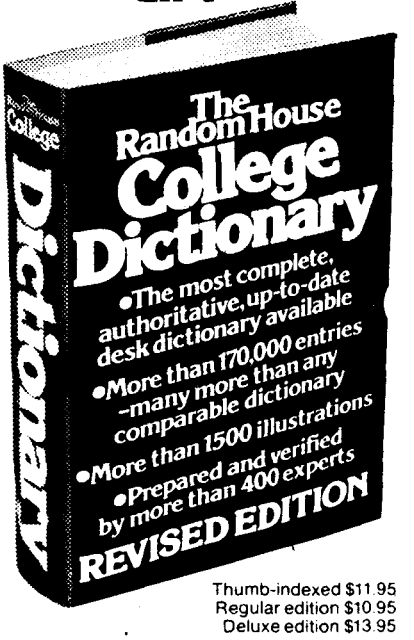
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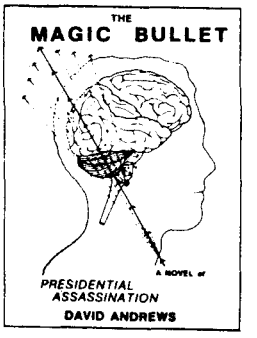

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"Usually I control myself"? How many depressions before he denies that "Most of the time I am happy"? And is it genuine confidence or mere fantasy when he says: "The picture I have of myself in the future satisfies me"?

Virtually all of Offer's and Harris's questions raise the same doubts. For the survey does not uncover a social and psychological reality, only a "normal" response to its questions. The respondents simply believe that they are as self-controlled, happy, responsible and so forth as their peers. Offer and Harris seem to have fallen victim to the fallacy they discern in others: letting traditional adult standards of thought and behavior (which stress abstract judgment, emotional stability and accommodation to fact) color their interpretations of adolescent self-knowledge. They seem to think that experience feels the same to adolescents and adults and that words carry the same meanings.

Anyone with adolescent children should know this is not so. Adolescents live with too many childhood confinements and too few adult obligations; they burn with too much restless energy and untested imagination to share the adult conceptions of, say, rationality, restraint, beauty, truth, dignity and happiness. Where else but in a world fed on fantasies of perfection and anxieties of rejection could such a maxim for adults hold as this commandment, issued to me by my 15-year-old daughter: "Don't tell me what to do, but don't let me make any mistakes"?

Foreign as the adult world is to most adolescents—at least as that world has been constituted for the past few centuries—adolescents can enter it in one of two ways: as confused aliens or as conquerors. They have long entered as aliens, to the loss and shame of adults. But signs indicate that they will one day soon enter as conquerors. The derogation of moral authority and psychic constraint, the demand for empathy with the young (openly exemplified by the several authors here) and the spreading cults of youthfulness and juvenile entertainment all point toward such a conquest. Created by capitalism and mass democracy as an ever-lengthening preparation for maturity, adolescence, with its penchant for fantasy, its impatience for excitement and its fragility of ego, threatens to become the model of maturity in the next century. □

A Bridge of Words

ROBERT LIPSYTE

TIGER EYES. *By Judy Blume. Bradbury Press. 206 pp. $9.95.*

The last time a group of librarians moaned over my pronouncement that Judy Blume was the most influential novelist in America, one of them later ambushed me outside the convention hall to whisper: "It's awful, but you're right. In my children's section, when we're out of Judy Blumes, we're out of books."

If librarians had to deal only with readers, they would appreciate Blume as much as I do. Kids gorge on Blume. They stay up all night to read *It's Not the End of the World* or *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* with a flashlight under the covers. They gossip in the schoolyard about Deenie and Fudge and Sally J. Freedman. Best of all, thousands of growing fingers that seemed destined only to flip channels have been hooked by Blume into the habit of turning pages. Even non-Blume pages. Sometimes my pages.

But that's not the only reason for my enthusiasm. Blume explores the feelings of children in a nonjudgmental way. The immediate resolution of a problem is never as important as what the protagonist, usually a white, middle-class girl, will learn about herself by confronting her life. The young reader gains from the emotional adventure story both by observing another youngster in a realistic situation and by finding a reference from which to start a discussion with a friend or parent or teacher. For many children, talking about a Blume story is a way to expose their own fears about menstruation or masturbation or death.

Unfortunately, librarians and teachers must respond to their nonreading constituencies as well, and, in the case of books for children and adolescents, the nonreaders are more powerful than the readers. The Far Righteous has made Blume a special target of book-banning crusades since she asks more questions than she answers, gently nudging her readers toward a healthy skepticism. Even many liberal parents, teachers and librarians have their qualms about her open, seemingly offhand treatment of sexuality. In many so-called "problem" juvenile novels, the wages of sin are abortions, V.D., suicide or at least a heavy guilt trip. Not so in Blume's books. The sexual humor in her 1975 best seller, *Forever*, compounded the outrage over the explicit sex play. A featured character was a penis named Ralph, and the book's opening line was this blunt narrative hook: "Sybil Davison has a genius I.Q. and has been laid by at least six different guys."

Blume's new book, *Tiger Eyes*, should slip past the censors. There is no explicit sex and there are no objectionable words. It is her finest book—ambitious, absorbing, smoothly written, emotionally engaging and subtly political. It is also a lesson on how the conventions of a genre can best be put to use.

The plot of *Tiger Eyes* is a staple of juvenile novels. A family member dies and the survivors must reconstitute themselves. Standard props are used: A lovable cat and a comical younger brother pop up from time to time to loosen the tension. Textbook suspense is created early: A mysterious paper bag and a romantic young stranger are left unexplained for many pages.

Thus the reader, perhaps 11 years old, is comfortable in TV sitcom territory. Even the opening chapter, in which a 15-year-old girl is searching for shoes to wear to the funeral of her father, shot during the robbery of his 7-Eleven store, is out of Eyewitness News.

But the story deepens, takes turns. Davey Wexler, her mother and her 7-year-old brother flee Atlantic City for the Los Alamos, New Mexico, home of the dead man's older sister, a rigid, domineering clubwoman, and her husband, a fearful, insular weapons scientist. In the oppressive atmosphere of Bomb City, the childless couple attempt to take control of the lives of the three visitors.

Davey's brother quickly attaches himself to his aunt and uncle. Davey's mother, drugged on headache pills, sinks into a depression. But Davey, a typically smart, assertive, spunky Blume heroine, never stops struggling for her

Robert Lipsyte's first Young Adult novel, The Contender *(Bantam), was published in 1967. His fourth,* Jock and Jill, *will be published in the spring by Harper and Row.*

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independence—sometimes foolishly (by refusing to wear a bicycle helmet on a mountain ride), sometimes heroically (by forcing herself to face repressed fears and guilts).

Tiger Eyes never falters, never slides into melodrama or preachment. Blume is a crisp and often funny stylist with a gift for defining character through snappy dialogue. She is unafraid of emotion. And she offers no final answers. No one in *Tiger Eyes* changes forever, or emerges sadder but wiser, or even learns her lesson well. Rather, a girl and her mother weather a crisis, often helped and hindered by the same well-meaning, mean-spirited people, and now must go forward with their lives.

No wonder Blume is currently the most popular writer of Young Adult novels, a genre supposedly aimed at 12- to 18-year-olds. Actually, I suspect that most Y.A. readers are in the fifth, sixth and seventh grades, which would make them about 10 to 13 years old. Some Blumes appeal to younger children, while the Y.A. novels of Robert Cormier (*The Chocolate War*, *After the First Death*) are for older, more sophisticated readers who would also enjoy *Lord of the Flies* and *The Catcher in the Rye*, quintessential Y.A. novels, although, like Cormier's work, they transcend any marketing label.

This Y.A. market has been defined and vigorously cultivated for less than twenty years, although books for and about teen-agers have a long and fascinating history. (Several excellent journals and source books have been inspired by Y.A. literature, notably *Literature for Today's Young Adults* by Kenneth L. Donelson and Alleen Pace Nilsen of Arizona State University, published by Scott, Foresman.) The current wave of Y.A. books began in the late 1960s with the novels of Paul Zindel (*The Pigman*), Maia Wojciechowska (*Tuned Out*), John Donovan (*I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth The Trip.*) and S.E. Hinton (*The Outsiders*), among others, which pushed aside the prom and the big game as important literary concerns to make room for drug abuse, alienation and the problems of death and divorce.

The genre expanded in the 1970s with such writers as M.E. Kerr (*Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack*), Norma Klein (*Mom, the Wolfman and Me*), Isabelle Holland (*The Man Without a Face*), Alice Childress (*A Hero Ain't Nothin' but a Sandwich*) and Robin Brancato (*Blinded by the Light*).

Of course, this is an incomplete list. The number and variety of Y.A. titles is staggering, and the range in quality of books marketed for young readers is wide. A cynical word-spill of slapdash, sexist junior Harlequins (Scholastic's Wildfire Romances, Bantam's Sweet Dreams and Simon and Schuster's First Love) vie for shelf space with finely crafted, thoughtful and entertaining novels by accomplished writers.

If there is a common denominator among the best of the Y.A. books, it is probably the writers' passion to point out new directions and overlooked possibilities for this vulnerable, needy audience, to offer hope and the message "You're not alone."

The teachers and the librarians who use these books also find that they provide a bridge of words that can carry a child into a lifetime of reading. Too many kids have been turned off reading for pleasure by well-intentioned adults who assigned the classics too early.

POLITICS

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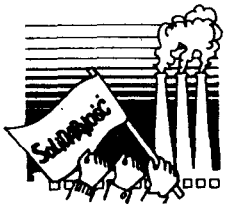
The State of the Republic
Compiled by the "Experience and the Future" Discussion Group



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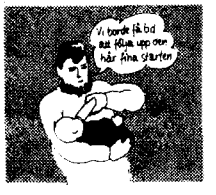

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Which brings us back to Judy Blume. Thousands of kids who have never read a book for pleasure before will find their way to *Tiger Eyes* through word of mouth, and then, out of Blumes, will ask for something more. □

History?

(*Continued From Front Cover*)

stood simply by leaning on old explanations like the cold war, mass culture and the long-overdue decline of sophisticated and simple-minded "theories" of unilinear progress.

That became clear at the Congress session. The panelists described how a new generation of historians has started to rewrite American history by asking new questions about such old subjects as the Revolutionary War, slavery and Populism, and by studying afresh changing class, race and gender relations as well as the history of family, work and community. But the questions and comments that followed revealed that two decades of important historical discovery and rediscovery had bypassed most of the people in the audience.

It was as if the American history written in the 1960s and 1970s had been penned in a foreign language and had probed the national experiences of Albania, New Zealand and Zambia. What explains the separation between those rewriting American history and their audience? The explanation has far more to do with what has happened to American history than with what has happened to the American audience. Two separate but related developments came together between 1950 and 1980 to cause this trouble.

The old Progressive synthesis that framed the writing of American history between 1920 and 1950 went out of favor in the 1950s. That synthesis—revealed most fully in the works of Charles and Mary Beard—conceptualized American history around a changing but ongoing tension between "the people" and "the special interests." National and sectional political conflicts over scarce economic resources and the distribution of income were central themes in the American experience. Critics of this older synthesis—Richard Hofstadter the most brilliant and telling among them—shrewdly dissected its shortcomings. But these critics failed to create an alternative synthesis.

In the 1950s, an intellectual climate that celebrated what the sociologist Paul Blumberg has called "class convergence" (or "the gospel of classlessness") made the older synthesis seem irrelevant. Post-World War II "abundance" put a premium on "assimilation" and "achievement" as constants in American history. The distinguished European intellectual historian Frank Manuel wisely complained of this development in 1976: "Much of nineteenth century American history," he wrote, "has been too thoroughly enveloped in nauseating fumes of official optimism to be tolerable to a human being."

The 1960s and 1970s saw a sharp shift away from this celebration of assimila-

Herbert G. Gutman is Distinguished Professor of History at the Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York and author of The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom: 1750-1925 *(Pantheon).*

Writers and Readers

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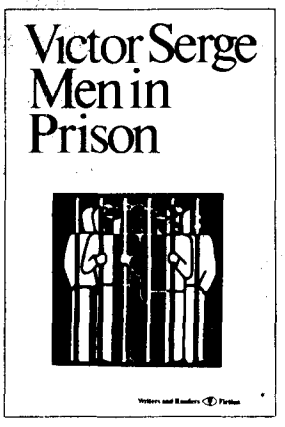

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tion and achievement in historical writing about America. British Marxist and neo-Marxist historians and the French historians associated with the *Annales* school helped shape this change. So did the disintegration of both American liberalism and Stalinism, the Vietnam War, and the civil rights, black power and feminist movements. The history of foreign relations, especially the history of the cold war, was revised first.

But by the end of the 1970s, whole segments of American history had a different look. A rich, empirical scholarship cast fresh light on the history of either misunderstood or neglected groups such as blacks, workers and women. A new generation of historians began to fill in what Lewis Coser called the "blank spaces over large areas of American . . . social history," spaces once "marked by the equivalent of 'here dwelleth lions' that one can see on African maps of old."

At its best, this new history revised important *segments* of the national experience. It neither taught "lessons" nor ransacked obscure libraries for its heroes and heroines. Instead, it focused on the diverse and competing traditions that shaped the country's history. It began to do more than compensate for past omissions. "Groups," the British historian David Caute has reminded us, "who lack a sense of their past resemble individuals without knowledge of their parents—stranded, half invalidated, insecure. The rediscovered past furnishes us . . . with a diachronic pattern which provides an alternative context for thought and action."

Caute is right. But the new history is not without its problems. And they are serious—especially at this moment when prevailing American post-World War II economic, social and political structures are changing in significant ways. In its emphasis on segments (such as blacks, workers or women), the new history often restores tradition. But the stress on segments also reinforces the disintegration of a coherent synthesis in the writing of American history, a process that started in the 1950s. *Pattern* and *context* are often ignored. The new history has failed to produce a new synthesis. And that is why its potential audience remains so small.

Black history has been rewritten in this generation. So has the history of women and that of the working class. The American Revolution looks very different today from the way it did thirty years ago. So do the antislavery movement, the Civil War, the Populist movement and the various socialist movements. But *American history* itself does not look that different. And that is the problem.

A new synthesis is needed, one that incorporates and then transcends the new history. We might move in that direction by asking historians a simple question: In what ways (if any) does our new understanding of black history, working-class history or women's history (and these are just examples) alter our understanding of American history?

T.S. Eliot phrased it well in *The Waste Land*. It was almost as if he were predicting the condition of American history after 1950:

> What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
> Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man
> You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
> A heap of broken images.

We need to go beyond the heap of broken historical images to live more decently and humanely in the late twentieth century. □

THEATER.

RICHARD GILMAN

The Dance and the Railroad Family Devotions

David Henry Hwang is a 24-year-old native of Los Angeles and the son of immigrant Chinese-American parents; his plays, all of which deal with the experiences of the Chinese in America, have been receiving considerable attention and praise. One of them, *FOB* (which stands for "Fresh Off the Boat") won an Obie last season, and two others, *The Dance and the Railroad* and *Family Devotions*, are presently on display at the Public Theater.

The Dance and the Railroad, which has been running for some time, is a short play whose two characters, named John Lone and Tzi Ma (which "happen" to be the names of the actors performing the roles), enact through dance, mime, acrobatics and speech a tale of political versus spiritual values—a muddy tale, I must say. Lone and Ma

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are workers on the transcontinental railroad (the time is 1867), and the action takes place on a mountain overlooking the work site. A strike has been called, and the two men are divided over its usefulness and especially over the eventual compromised settlement.

They are connected by the admiration of Ma, the younger man, for Lone, who had been a leading opera performer in China and who, disdaining his fellow workers as "dead" men, spends his time on the mountain practicing dances and other routines. The men's deadness results, he says, from the fact that they work only because "the white men force them to," whereas he lives because he "can still force my muscles to work for me." Ma objects to this, but he is powerfully attracted to Lone's physical prowess and begs to be taken on as an apprentice, his goal being stardom and pots of money when he goes back to China. Lone does take on Ma, a clumsy fellow, and much of what interest the piece has rests on the discrepancy between Lone's "purity" and dedication and Ma's worldly ambitions.

There are some rather impressive acrobatic turns by Lone and some mildly amusing physical byplay between him and Ma, but the work is painfully deficient from a verbal standpoint, when it isn't pretentious. "The mountain is millions of years old," one of the men says. "Its wisdom is immense." As I said, the narrative is murky, having something to do in the end with Ma's denunciation of Lone for his political and economic naïveté and the latter's returning, whether chastened or not I couldn't tell, to his lonely exercises. Lone—the actor, that is—also directed the play and wrote the music; he won an Obie last season for this performance, but from what I saw it must have been for his gymnastic feats.

Family Devotions, which has recently opened, is also short but has much more going on in it, though to no greater point, as far as I could see. Set in southern California at the present time, it concerns a Chinese-American family (there's also a Japanese fellow, a relative by marriage) who seem to be living well in their ranch house—they talk about tax shelters and the like, dress in crisp tennis clothes and have elaborate barbecues on their patio—but turn out to be bitterly divided in their values. The younger people are the most Americanized and materialistic, while the older generation, in the persons of a mother and a grandmother, represent a spiritual dimension.

The spirituality isn't Chinese, however, but some form of Protestant evangelism—in other words, something borrowed, Western and "inauthentic." At least this is the argument advanced by a new arrival, a relative visiting from China. This uncle, who seems to accept Communism primarily because he accepts China, confronts the family with their "betrayal": "If you deny those who share your blood," he says, "what do you have in this country?" This is the playwright's point of view, too, and he works hard at an intricate plot which culminates in a melodramatic revelation of an even deeper kind of inauthenticity: the women's religiosity has been based on a lie. It would be unfair of me to reveal its nature, but I will say that the whole episode struck me as arbitrary and unconvincing.

Even so, inferior plots don't always result in inferior dramas; there are possibilities of rich textures, resonances and acuity of performance, all of which can rescue delinquent stories. But *Family Devotions* has none of these virtues; the dialogue strains alternately after wit and profundity, the physical actions long to be farcical or grave but are merely foolish or lugubrious. And the production itself is so inept, from the graceless movements of the performers to the Charlie Chan or Fu Manchu accents some of them employ, that one might suspect director Robert Allan Ackerman of a parodic notion, were not the whole enterprise so patently in earnest.

It's this earnestness, this "good intention," that I think is a major reason for the critical and popular enthusiasm for Hwang's work. The response is chiefly to the *fact* that, for the first time, a Chinese-American playwright is speaking his mind about his own people and America; another minority is being heard from. We've seen this happen in recent years with black, Chicano, feminist and gay writers, and no doubt it happened years ago with Jewish ones. In almost every case there's been a lowering of standards, not surprising to be sure, yet dispiriting nevertheless. A bad playwright or, in the case of Hwang, a crude and thus far unskillful one, can only be encouraged in his or her inadequacies by this triumph of politics over dramatic art. Or have we reached a point where to say this is to risk appearing both elitist and naïve? □

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FILMS.

ROBERT HATCH

The Boat is Full

The Boat Is Full (*Das Boot Ist Voll*), a Swiss-German-Austrian production, was originally seen in New York City as part of the New Directors/New Films series at the Museum of Modern Art. And though Markus Imhoof, who both wrote and directed the film, is new to us, his work suggests that he is not entirely new to the job. *The Boat Is Full* has the legendary quality of a tableau, bringing down to human scale a disaster that otherwise is too vast to be coped with emotionally.

The time is about midway through World War II. A group of refugees from Germany have escaped across the Swiss border and taken temporary shelter in a country inn. They are a mixed bag: a brother and a sister, whose husband is said to be in Swiss custody; a deserter from the Wehrmacht; an old man; a young girl, and a small boy, who speaks only French. All of them are Jews, except of course the soldier.

The essence of the story is the relationship between the wayfarers and the Swiss citizens and officials with whom they come in contact. The atmosphere is ambiguous, to say the least. For a start, the innkeeper and his wife are less than happy to have such guests on their premises. Switzerland is in a state of unaccustomed nervousness from the storm that is beating against its borders. Food is rationed, rumor is officially discouraged, identification papers are called for on every occasion. Times are bad, and publicans are a breed who, even when times are good, dislike the sensation of getting involved. On the other hand, this pair has no stomach for throwing the unhappy pilgrims out into the street. Reluctantly, almost involuntarily, Herr and Frau Flockiger find themselves guardians of the forlorn group. Played by Mathias Gnädinger and Renate Steiger with rough but resourceful charity, they epitomize the instinctive reaction of the small community.

However, there are laws, and the Swiss are an obsessively law-abiding people. They hate and despise the Nazis, and yet it troubles them that the newcomers are fugitives from Nazi "justice." And it troubles them a good deal more when the refugees undertake to bend Swiss law to their needs. The government has established strict rules for the granting of sanctuary. It may be extended to political escapees, but Jews, per se, are not so regarded. (The reasons are obvious: almost all refugees are Jews; Switzerland is a small country and "the boat is full"; it is not prudent to annoy a powerful, war-maddened neighbor.) But the Swiss are also not without compassion, and there are exceptions to the rule: families that include small children may stay, as may the elderly; military deserters will not be sent to face the firing squad. The group at the inn bestirs itself, with the help of its guilt-abashed hosts, to see how it may arrange itself to fit the loopholes. The young woman becomes the mother of the girl and the French boy (who is instructed to play deaf and dumb); the soldier steps in as the father of this "family" and gives his uniform to the brother, who soon finds himself being knocked about by Fascist-hating policemen. It is a little funny and desperately sad. Also, it doesn't work for long, since the harried players soon forget their lines. The film, based it seems on a true incident, gathers momentum like a river approaching the falls. All in all, the people one meets are decent, even somewhat courageous, while Swiss officialdom seems coldly righteous. However, I would withhold that judgment—the Nazis were vile and growing frantic (they were deep in Russia at the time), and the Swiss had their civilization to save.

The Boat Is Full tells its tale with a modest, unstrained flow of picturesque incidents and vivid characters. It is earthy, cheerful and sometimes briefly farcical, despite the tension that grips the refugees and the uneasiness of the Swiss. It recalls the anecdotal innocence of Marcel Pagnol's 1930s peasant films, though there is nothing at all innocent about its underlying theme. Markus Imhoof has made a small, splendidly executed, quietly tragic picture. □

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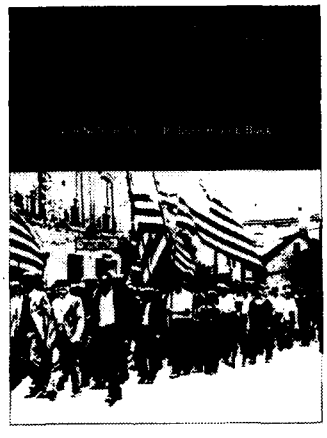

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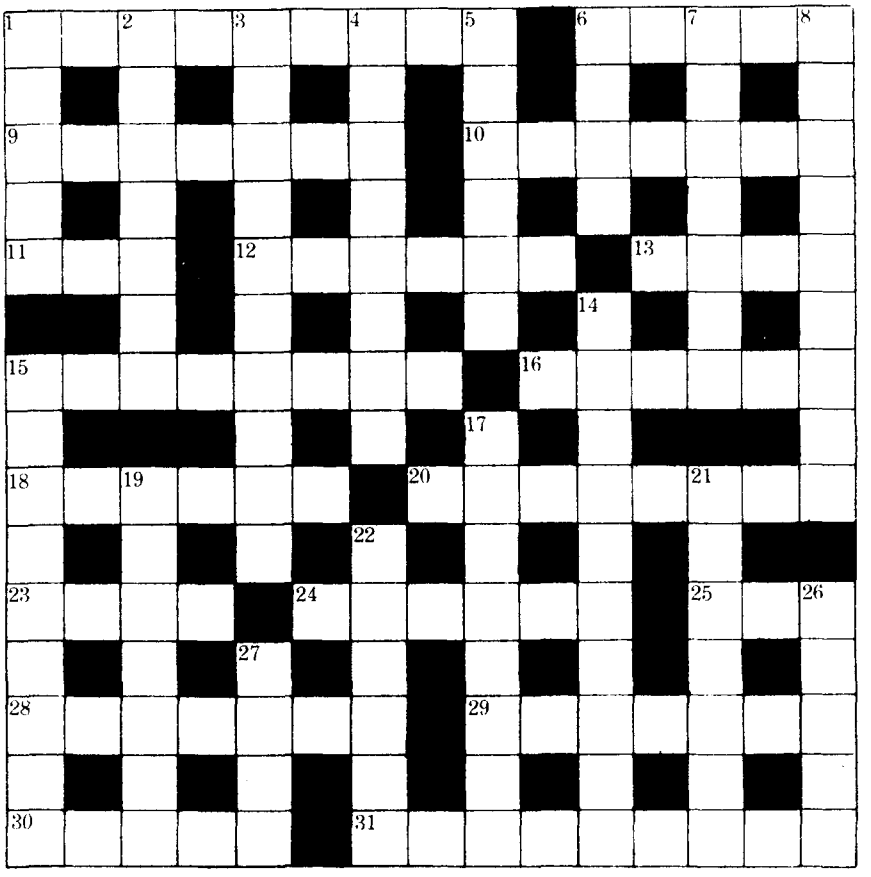

ACROSS

1 Our nation is wrong to start trail-breaking with a foreign country. (9)
6 In pool, does one from 1 across perhaps use it, even though things don't proceed very fast at it? (5)
9 So-called upper-class prudes of a sort took over this way. (7)
10 A moving part with most of the building block might be material. (7)
11 and 18 One doesn't think of others in trouble? Come again! (9)
12 One inside sheds little ones in the highlands. (6)
13 An account to be paid with money, obviously. (4)
15 See 26 down
16 See 22 down
18 See 11
20 Where the really content could be considered heavenly. (8)
23 The measure of an unromantic farewell gesture? (4)
24 Playwright who provides an obstacle, almost? (6)
25 and 30 Underworld character slacks off, with such things as the flu. (8)
28 The proverbially honest one gets fat, still thought of as one of a loving pair. (7)
29 Lake bed? Quite the other way around the circle, perhaps. (7)
30 See 25 across
31 The record, as one might say, colored by it? Say it isn't so! (9)

DOWN

1 and 5 It doesn't imply a charming drawl, as used by the French. (5,6)
2 Nothing on one side, if so. (4,3)
3 With the party in place, rub the wrong way? (10)
4 Those who are taken in might be looking for them. (8)
5 See 1 down
6 Those who part might find it other than the honeyed type. (4)
7 A cockney might say it was receding, but there are lots of ups and downs in such a business. (7)
8 An Englishman's visit to the pub? (Since it's not a long distance, it doesn't cost much.) (5,4)
14 One probably leads the way in a walk with the dog. (4,6)
15 It may take the place of the old-fashioned shingle. (9)
17 Rather shakily, start to put on a performance inside, as the top billing reputedly does. (8)
19 There should be 20 in our smallest 13, giving sort of silken surroundings for the Copperhead. (7)
21 A sort of nude color was permanent, evidently. (7)
22 and 16 across Has the ability, and performed the mechanical part of 10, taking time to provide a frank portrayal. (6,6)
26 and 15 across Is naught sugar-coated with them? (That's what such as 28 say in lighter moments.) (5,7)
27 Might it be associated with a lowering of standards? (Some are turned on by dances, in a way.) (4)

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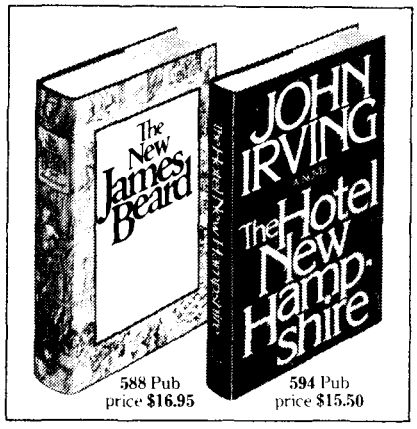

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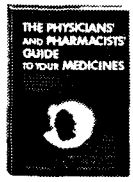

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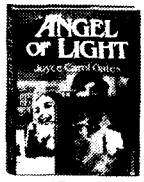

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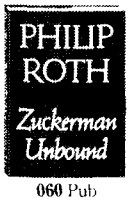

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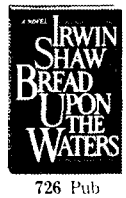

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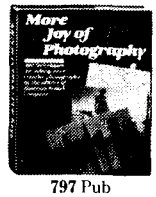

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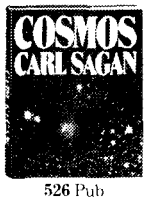

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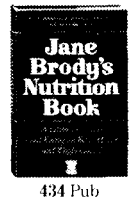

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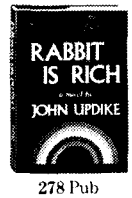

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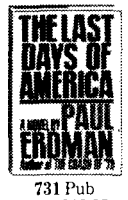

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1-14

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